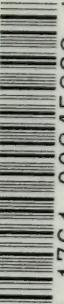


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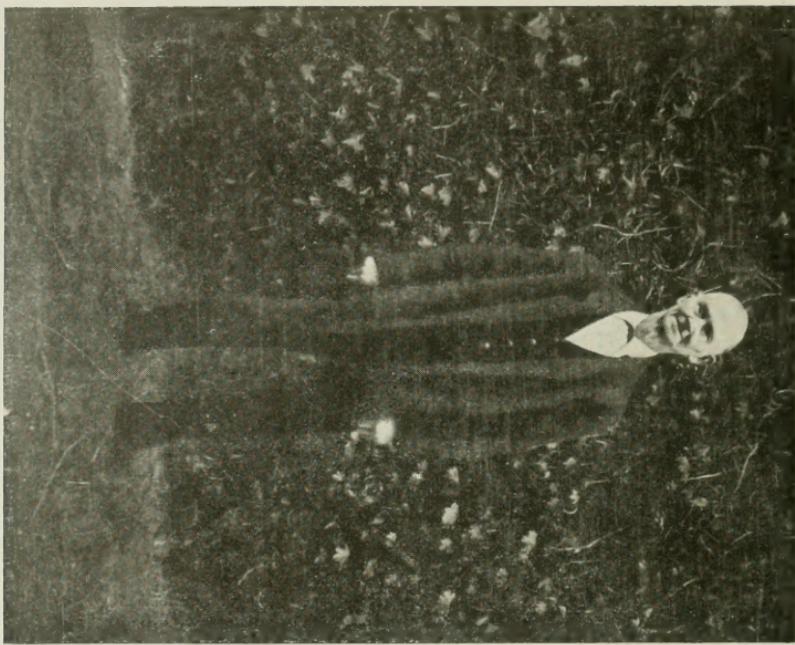


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Irish Sport of Yesterday

Dorgreen.



Jack.



Irish Sport of Yesterday

By Major A. W. Long

Sports, Types and Yarns of Western Ireland Life

With Nine Illustrations

BOSTON AND NEW YORK:
HOUGHTON MIFFLIN COMPANY
1923



Printed in Great Britain

54

1911

26

1921

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

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Irish Sport of Yesterday

PART I

I

FOR some time past my brother Charles and I had been seriously thinking of taking a shooting lodge in the wild west of Ireland for a winter: and, after a long correspondence, had at last hit on what seemed a sportsman's paradise. According to the owner game of every kind seemed to be touching each other on this particular estate—grouse, snipe, geese, plover, duck of all kinds, hares, curlew and woodcock: poachers were unheard of, the shooting lodge a home from home, and as for the setters—well, it would seem that they could do anything bar talk.

Our first effort to take a shooting, an advertisement in the *Irish Times*, was most unfortunate: for, though it produced many answers from different parts of Ireland, hardly one had any reference to the kind of shooting we required. One man was willing to let us a hunting-box in Co. Kildare, and was quite sure that rough shooting could be rented in the neighbourhood; another offered us fishing in Co. Cork; and one lady was most anxious

to let her little cottage on the shore of some large lake, where there was excellent bathing and the best of free fishing, but only to careful tenants.

Our only sister, Mary, declined to venture to a shooting lodge 40 miles from the nearest station, and, as the owner described it, "divil another decent house between it and America"—from which description we concluded that the lodge must be somewhere in the vicinity of the Atlantic Ocean. But though Mary was going to stay at home, yet she took the greatest interest in our expedition, and bought every book on the west of Ireland she could find.

The evening before we were to start for Ireland Mary read us out a description of the Kingdom of Connaught from one of her numerous books—one she had picked up in a secondhand bookshop. "It lieth under a dark grey cloud, which is evermore discharging itself on the earth, but, like the widow's cruse, is never exhausted. It is bounded on the south and east by Christendom and part of Tipperary, on the north by Donegal, and on the west by the salt say. It abounds in bogs, lakes and other natural curiosities; its soil consists of equal parts of earth and stone, and its surface is so admirably disencumbered of trees, shrubs, hedges and ditches that an intelligent backwoodsman from Louisiana was heard to declare with rapture that it was the most perfectly cultivated territory in Europe." We said nothing, but Charles lit the candles and we retired to bed.

On a fine October morning we landed at Kings-

town, and just caught the breakfast train from Broadstone to the west: and after about two hours' travelling through an uninteresting country, changed on to a branch line which would carry us to our destination, or rather to the terminus from which we were to start on our 40-mile drive.

After we had left some small station the train suddenly came to a halt, and the guard, engine-driver and fireman held an excited conversation on the line: after a considerable time we learnt from a fellow-passenger that the train's "staff" had been left behind at the last station and that the guard dare not proceed without it. Further questioning informed us that we were on a single line, and that no train was allowed to leave the station without the "staff" for the next station.

It looked as though we were stuck indefinitely, but luck was with us: the guard suddenly appeared to go mad, yelling, and blowing his whistle, and waving his arms at a man riding a bicycle on the road, which at this point ran parallel with the railway line. It seemed that the cyclist was a friend of the guard's, and, after the promise of gallons of porter, was induced to ride back to the last station, with a note to the station master to hand over the "staff" without delay.

After our long journey we must have fallen asleep, for presently we were startled by yells and cat-calls from the whole train, and on looking out of the window saw the cyclist tearing down the road and waving the missing "staff" above his head;

and after a further delay of quite a quarter of an hour, every man and woman in the train had to thank the cyclist, we got under way again.

Every station we stopped at was crowded with people, mostly young, who appeared to do nothing but walk up and down the platform, criticizing the travellers in the train: a man in our carriage told us that this was a recognized form of amusement at all rural stations in the west of Ireland, and took the place of a cinema at many small towns.

The country now began to change: we were passing through the middle of Ireland—green fields and hedges giving place to bogs and rushy land. I remembered an extract Mary had read out of one of her numerous books on Ireland, describing the country as an ugly picture in a beautiful frame, and certainly the description was most apt.

But later on, after changing again at another junction, we began to come to the “frame,” and the description still held good: the train began to pass through a wild and picturesque country, past great lakes and huge bogs with beautiful mountains in the background, and over all the soft and lovely lights from the low autumn sun.

Towards evening the train at last reached the terminus (several hours late, owing to the “staff” episode), from which we were to start on our 40-mile drive to the shooting lodge: but, owing to the lateness of our arrival, no car could be induced to start before next morning, one long-haired, capless youth, with an ancient Ford, declaring

that there were holes in the road big enough to swallow his car and all.

So there was nothing to be done except to spend the night at the hotel in the town and start as early as possible the next morning: the long-haired youth, Larry by name, drove us to the hotel in his old Ford, and agreed to take us out to the shooting lodge early the next morning.

At dinner a most amusing commercial traveller from Dublin sat at our table, and gave us a lot of information about the part of the country we were going to. He also told us a story of an Englishman whom he had met some years before in the south of Cork, and we prayed that our fate might not be the same.

This Englishman took a large tract of shooting in one of the wildest parts of the south of Ireland—a part of Ireland, our friend the commercial traveller assured us, where there had been no preservation of game for years past, and every bog used to be shot by two or three different local sportsmen every day during the snipe season;—and arrived with two brace of grand-looking English setters. The result of the first day's shooting was one snipe. The Englishman, being of a practical turn of mind, on the way back to the hotel in the evening, made up his mind to return to England the next day, and started to reckon up the cost of his trip. What between the rent of the shooting, hotel and travelling expenses, the amount came to £100. Turning to the gillie, who was trudging behind him carrying the one and only snipe, he remarked: “Well,

Pat, that snipe cost me £100." " Begorra, yer honour," replied the gillie, " it's lucky you didn't shoot any more."

The next morning I was aroused from a heavy sleep by violent knocking at my bedroom door, followed by the entrance of the "boots," Pat, in his shirt sleeves, who seemed anxious to know when I should be after getting up, adding inconsequently that it was a fine saft morning. Not quite understanding what my getting up had to do with the "boots," I told him so, and he retired. About a quarter of an hour afterwards the same performance was repeated, with the additional information this time from Pat, that the hotel was so "thronged" the night before that Maria (presumably the chambermaid) had been obliged to use the tablecloth from the coffee-room as the top sheet of my bed, and that two bagmen, who had to leave by the early train, were after shouting for their breakfast. At the same time I could hear heavy breathing outside the door, and an agitated voice (apparently Maria's), said: "Hurry up, Pat, there's thim divils yowling for their breakfasts agin." I quickly handed the tablecloth to Pat, a large red hand gripped it round the door, and I could hear a "Lord save us" from Maria, as she dashed off to appease the now infuriated bagmen. Shortly afterwards, escorted by Maria, I proceeded to the bathroom, to find that, though there was plenty of boiling water, there was not a drop of cold. Maria was full of apologies and said that the lad who pumped had gone to early Mass, and if I

would wait awhile there would be plenty of cold water as soon as he returned ; but, as it was getting late, I determined to do without a bath.

During breakfast word was brought us from Larry that he would not be able to start before twelve, owing to engine trouble ; so after breakfast, as it was a fine day, we determined to have a look at the town and also buy some provisions.

It was market day, and the little town was full of country people, buying provisions and selling eggs and butter. In the main street we saw what is a familiar sight in England, some men engaged in digging up a gas or water main in the middle of the roadway. Stopping to see what they were doing, we found that one man was digging while two more smoked and looked on, occasionally giving the digger helpful advice. While standing we were joined by a horsey-looking man, who remarked with a grin that it always took two Irish-men to watch one working. " Ah, well," replied one of the watchers like a flash, " there's five of us now." Nothing daunted, our horsey friend walked on down the main street with us, doubtless trying to find out who we were and what our business was. At the corner of the street we passed an old woman seated on the kerb, selling fish in a basket. " Well, ma'am," says our friend to the old woman, " is them young whales yer selling ? " " Ah, no, agra," answered the old fishwoman, " they're jist little cods like yerself." Apparently this retort was too much for our horsey friend, as we saw him no more.

We were struck by the civility and good manners of the country people, not to mention their great curiosity in us as strangers ; but there seemed to be so much laughter and light-hearted chaff going on everywhere that one wondered how they did any business at all.

We also noticed the great difference in the appearance of the country people we saw in the town : while some were very well-bred-looking, especially the young men, with small regular features, good figures and flat backs, others were squat and common-looking, especially the older men, with an extraordinarily long upper lip—very like the caricatures one sees of an Irishman in a comic American paper, and usually called “ Moike.” The young girls, though not so pretty in most cases as we had been led to expect, had lovely complexions, doubtless due to the soft air of the west.

On arriving at our hotel we found Larry waiting for us, while Pat and Maria were busy packing our kit into the old Ford, and trying at the same time to leave room for us. In the back of the car Charles noticed a sack full of what appeared to be large potatoes or small turnips, and asked Pat why the sack had been put into the car. “ Well now, yer honour,” replied Pat, “ Larry says as how the road is that bad he’s after taking the little sack of stones with him to fill up the holes.” And nothing we could say or do would induce Larry to leave his little sack of stones behind.

After saying good-bye to Maria and Pat, we started on the last stage of our journey, and, once

Larry's engine warmed up, proceeded at a good pace, in spite of the many carts we passed for several miles after leaving the town. After about four miles the road for some distance ran by the shores of a large lake, and about half a mile from the shore we could see a fair-sized island with white cottages on it. Larry, by whom I sat, saw me looking at the island, and ejaculated: "The distillery of the West," and on being pressed for an explanation, told us that the island was a famous place for making "poteen," illicit whisky. It appeared that all the inhabitants of the island made their living out of "poteen," and, in spite of all the police could do, carried on a roaring trade with the mainland. Such pride did the "poteen" makers take in their trade that one of them even went the length of working in Bass's maltings at Burton-on-Trent in order to become an efficient maltster.

The police had kept two large boats on the lake for years—we passed one shortly afterwards on a small bay of the lake—in order to try and suppress this illicit distillery, but all in vain.

After leaving the shores of the lake the road took a sharp bend to the right round a high rock, and in turning this corner we narrowly missed running into an ass-cart, on the wrong side of the road, as usual. Larry, after abusing the driver of the cart, remarked that: "Them fools would drive on the wrong side, even if the right side was the right side, and anyhow it's easier and safer to drive a car on the wrong side."

Shortly afterwards we passed through a straggling

village and Larry, whose engine by this time was boiling, showed a fine turn of speed, so much so that, in swerving to avoid a child playing in the middle of the road, he ran over a dog asleep outside a small public-house; and, in spite of Larry's objections, Charles insisted on stopping to apologize to the owner of the dog. But the publican, when he appeared, wanted more than an apology. It appeared that the dog was invaluable. Not only did he perform the usual functions of a dog in Ireland, such as bringing the cows home at night, putting the hens to bed before the foxes came down from the mountains, and such minor duties as killing rats and mice, but, in addition to all this, the wonderful dog used all day to guard the barrels of porter outside the pub, so that, as the publican expressively put it: "Devil a lad in the town was ever able to steal a tint of stout." And now that his dog was dead, he would have to hire a lad at 18s. a week to guard the porter barrels, "and God alone knew how much stout the lad would steal on him."

Matters began to look serious when a R.I.C. sergeant sauntered up and inquired what the trouble was. Larry explained to the sergeant, the sergeant gave the publican a look, Larry whispered to me to give the publican 5s. (which I promptly did), at the same time starting up his engine, and in a second we were off again.

We now began to pass through great stretches of moorland, and in the distance we could see a range of mountains, and after crossing a small

mountain river the road began to look as though Larry's little sack of stones might yet be needed.

After a few miles we turned off to the left up a by-road, or, as Larry called it, a "bohereen," and the going became worse still. However, eventually, by slow and skilful driving on Larry's part, we came within sight of the shooting lodge, and seldom, if ever, have I seen a more lovely scene. The lodge, a low white building with high wooden gables painted red, stood on a gentle slope facing the south-west ; in front of the lodge ran a fine mountain river, now in full winter flood ; to the south and west the Atlantic Ocean thundered on a sandy beach about a mile distant from the lodge ; and to the east and north the lodge had for a background a fine range of heather-clad mountains, now a gorgeous pink in the setting sun.

At the door of the lodge the keeper, Micky Brogan, and his wife welcomed us, and with them two fine red setters, who seemed fully to realize what our arrival meant for them : and very soon we were sitting down to a tea of eggs and bacon, with fresh, home-made soda bread and butter, before a roaring turf fire on an open hearth.

After tea Mrs. Brogan showed us over the lodge, which we found consisted of one large sitting-room and three bedrooms, plainly furnished, but clean and comfortable looking.

When we had unpacked our kit we sent for Brogan, and asked him what prospects of shooting there were and if the snipe and woodcock were in yet. Brogan told us that there were plenty of snipe in,

but that the woodcock were late—in fact, the first flight generally arrived early in October, and rested on the lower slopes of the mountain behind the lodge before spreading inland and taking up their usual winter quarters. He also added that the grouse had not been shot at all this season, and that we ought to try a day with them at once.

And so to bed.

II

I AWOKE the next morning to the plaintive cry of curlew flighting over the lodge to the shore in search of food, and the heavy thud of the Atlantic rollers. Lying in bed, I could view not only the sea, but a great expanse of mountain and moor to the south.

Overnight we had settled with Brogan that we would shoot some grouse-ground about three miles away from the lodge, and that we would drive out to the far end of the beat on Brogan's outside car, so as to be able to shoot practically the whole way back to the lodge.

Breakfast over, we started, the two red setters, Fan and Grouse, running alongside the car, and mad with joy at the anticipation of sport. It was a perfect October day, with the wonderful clear atmosphere peculiar to the west of Ireland—so clear, in fact, that one could distinctly see the white cottages on two islands far out in the Atlantic, and even see the blue turf smoke curling out of the chimneys. Every crag and rock on the mountain-sides stood out in bold relief, as though seen through a powerful Zeiss glass.

The road, so called by Brogan, but in reality merely a track of two ruts with a few loose stones in the middle, had been made in the days when

people in this wild part of the world rode, and before outside cars had been invented, and ran practically straight across the moorland, quite oblivious of gradients or stream. After driving about two miles, we took another road to the left, up a valley towards the mountains, and at the top of the valley stopped at a herd's house, where we were to leave the car, which the herd would drive back to the lodge for us.

During the drive Brogan told us that in his grandfather's time these mountains were full of red deer; but that, when the French landed at Killala Bay in 1798 (the year of the Irish Rebellion), under General Humbert, they brought with them a large number of muskets with which to arm the Irish peasantry. After the French were defeated and the Rebellion had been suppressed, many of the muskets which had been distributed among the peasants in the west were buried or carefully hidden, and afterwards used by the peasants to shoot the red deer until they became exterminated. The French barrels were supposed to fire a longer and straighter bullet than the English musket.

Brogan also asked us if we had noticed a large square white house close to the village where Larry had run over the dog, and told us a curious story of how the house came to be built. It seemed that General Humbert brought with him from France several treasure chests, doubtless to pay his troops with, and possibly to buy food with in Ireland. When the French marched on Castlebar, they advanced in two columns, one

along each bank of the river Moy. The column on the east bank left a treasure chest at the cottage of a man called Faherty, who lived about half-way between Ballina and Foxford, doubtless meaning to return and pick up the chest again. However, the French never returned ; Faherty kept the chest, built the large white house we had seen with the proceeds, and became a Connaught country gentleman.

When we arrived at the cottage the herd and his barefooted children were busy drawing the winter's supply of turf from a bog in the valley, and stacking the turf at the gable ends of the cottage, each child driving a donkey with a large pair of basket panniers on its back, suspended on a wooden saddle padded with plaited straw.

Our morning's sport was excellent. The dogs were in good working condition, and under perfect control ; but at noon the light westerly breeze quite died away, and we determined to have lunch, then rest for two or three hours, and attack the grouse again in the late afternoon, when they would be feeding.

During the morning we had been working our way steadily up the side of the mountain from the time we had left the herd's cottage ; and now as we were within a short distance of the summit, we determined to climb to the top before resting.

We were well repaid for our trouble. A scene, glorious beyond imagination, burst upon us. To the west the dark blue waters of the Atlantic extended, till the eye lost them in the far horizon : to the north we could just see across a bay the coast

and mountains of Donegal, a faint ethereal blue : to the south stretched the rugged mountains of Connemara, silhouetted against the brilliant blue sky with a small white cloud on the highest peak, and all around us a vast solitude of heathery moorland, a beautiful soft brown and green in the bright autumn sunshine.

During lunch Brogan told us that the grouse on all the mountains along the Atlantic sea-board lay so close right up to the end of the shooting season, that unless you used the best of setters and beat the ground most carefully, you would leave most of the birds behind ; while if you went inland to the next range of mountains you would find that often, even on the 12th of August, the grouse were so wild that shooting over dogs you could not get within eighty yards of the packs.

On a rocky ledge, close to the top of the mountain, we saw a small flock of about twenty choughs, their brilliant orange bills and legs showing up plainly in the bright clear light.

The higher we had climbed during the morning the more hares we had seen, and every hare invariably made a bee line for the top of the mountain. According to Brogan, they frequent the higher parts of the mountains until the bad weather sets in, when they descend to the bogs and valleys of the lowlands for the winter.

While we were resting after lunch we saw a pair of peregrine falcons beating a valley below us like a pair of perfectly trained setters. After a time one bird swooped and rose again, doubtless with a

grouse, but we were too far off to see. We also several times heard the croak of ravens, and could just see them, faint black specks against the blue sky high overhead, in search of a dead mountain sheep for their dinner.

Soon after starting to shoot again, Brogan pointed out to us a cluster of three small mountain tarns in a valley, and told us that the white-fronted geese on their arrival in the country from the far North invariably rested on these lakes for several days after their long and tiring flight ; but that they were late this year, and ought to be with us any day now.

Soon afterwards Fan put up out of some long heather three short-eared owls ; " woodcock owls," Brogan called them, and added that they always appeared a few days before the first flight of woodcock arrived.

We found several packs of grouse, all feeding on ground recently burnt and covered with fine young heather ; and on reaching the lodge found that we had shot fifteen brace of grouse, two brace of mallard and four hares, Brogan having about as much as he could carry.

Mrs. Brogan gave us most delicious sea trout, caught by her son during the afternoon in the river, for tea ; and we felt at peace with the world.

After tea Brogan called us out to listen to the heavy ground sea, which had just started to come in from the Atlantic. It was too dark to see it, but one could hear the roar and feel the heavy thud, as each great wave dashed against the beach, and Brogan foretold the end of the fine weather.

The following morning I felt stiff and sore after our hard walking on the mountains, and awoke to find that Brogan's prophecy had been fulfilled ; there was a steady downpour of rain, the sea was hardly visible, and the mountains were completely hidden by the low clouds.

One could hardly imagine a greater change in the weather—yesterday bright and sunny, and to-day dismal and damp. But at noon the wind suddenly veered from S.W. to N.W., the rain stopped, the sun came out, the clouds rolled away, and by two o'clock the day was nearly as fine as the previous one.

After the heavy rain the mountains and moors had a wonderful look, as though they had been freshly washed, and the sun brought out the shades of purple, brown, orange and green more vividly than ever.

The sudden change of the day made us determine to try a big marsh some distance to the south, which Brogan had told us was a great place for duck and golden plover flighting in the evening.

After an early tea we started off on the car, leaving two very dejected-looking setters behind us, but taking an Irish water-s spaniel of Brogan's, called Paddy. For some distance the road ran close to the sea, so near in places that we could distinctly see flocks of dunlins feeding on the edge of the incoming tide, and at one point we put up a large flock of oyster catchers.

At the end of an hour's slow driving we came to a small fishing village on the very edge of the seashore, behind which there was a ridge of cultivated land, and beyond that stretched the marsh

we had come to shoot. In reality the marsh was a huge bog, studded with bogholes of every size, and in the middle a good-sized lake with a broad fringe of reeds round it.

As the golden plover were expected to "flight" before the duck, we at once made our way across the bog to the lake. Here we found that there was a causeway built through the reeds, which led to two hiding-places on the edge of the gravel shore of the lake. Brogan told us that on most winter evenings all the golden plover from far and wide collect on the shores of this lake to rest, as it is sheltered from every wind and never disturbed.

Charles took one hiding-place, and Brogan, Paddy and I went to the other. I found that my hiding-place, or "blind" as Brogan called it, was cleverly built of rushes and reeds, with a long narrow loophole on the lake side, so that one could fire well to the right or left. We spent about an hour here and had excellent shooting at the golden plover, which came in most of the time in large "stands," and would wheel several times over the lake and shores, low, and at a terrific pace before alighting on the shore to rest. Practically every "stand" sooner or later wheeled within shot of our "blinds"; and though they would give magnificent shots if they flew singly, yet the great pace of the birds and the uncertain light, with generally a background of dark mountain or bog, made the shooting difficult enough.

After about an hour Brogan took us to another set of "blinds," in the middle of a large group

of bogholes, and here we waited for the duck, which came in late, owing to the fineness of the evening. While we were waiting there was a constant stream of birds overhead seawards, chiefly curlew. Owing to the duck not coming in until nearly dark, we had indifferent shooting, but could see that on a wild evening—when duck come in early, in order to be well settled down to their dinner before darkness sets in—we ought to have good sport.

As soon as it was too dark to see the duck at all—and in that marsh it seemed suddenly to grow as dark as the bottomless pit—we started for the village. Very soon Charles could be heard shouting for help, and when we at last found him he was bogged to his middle and unable to move.

I tried to go to Charles's aid, but started at once to get bogged myself, and had to give up the attempt. However, Brogan was wiser, and sent Paddy out to Charles, telling him to lay hold of the dog's tail and hold tight. Then started a terrific pulling match. In the darkness one could hear the pants of the dog, the squelches as he drew each leg out of the fast-holding bog, and the groans of the unfortunate Charles.

Apparently Paddy had been at the game before, as he pulled with all his might and main, until at last he drew Charles on to firm ground, and then lay down dead-beat. We then formed a chain like mountaineers, with Brogan leading, and so got clear of that dreadful bog safely.

On reaching the cottage where we had put up, Charles presented a woeful sight, covered with a

rich coating of dark-brown mud from head to foot, and even his face had been plastered with the bog mud from the back lash of Paddy's hind legs during the pulling match.

Luckily we had brought a change with us, but the question was where to change. The owners of the cottage were full of sympathy, but the cottage only consisted of one room, while the family consisted of eight—the man and his wife and six children. In the end Charles had to change in a barn by the light of one candle, with two donkeys, a calf, and numerous hens and ducks for companions—a great change from his comfortable bedroom at home.

Meanwhile the man of the house produced a large jar of "poteen," while the eldest boy and girl played a flute and melodeon respectively, and the other children danced, Brogan confining his attention to the "poteen" jar.

Tune followed tune, and the children never stopped dancing; and as each fresh tune started, Brogan told me the name: "The Wind that stirs the Barley," "The Geese in the Bog," "The Devil among the Tailors," "The Hare in the Corn," "The Swallow's Tail," "The Flogging Reel," and, most curious of all, "The Pig's Trot to the Hole of Potatoes." Brogan explained that the last tune was meant to indicate the joyful patter of a pig's feet on its perceiving a potato-pit left open in a field.

By the time we had said good-bye to our kind hosts and packed our kit on the car, Brogan had, as he put it himself, "a drop of drink taken."

Charles, who was cross and tired after his bogging, said that he was drunk. We drove off into the pitch-dark night at a hand gallop, and for the first mile all our attention was taken up with holding on to the car. Luckily, at the end of the first mile we came to a hill, and by this time the pony had had enough, and refused to go beyond a steady sober trot.

The cool night air had sobered Brogan a little, and he started to tell us an amusing story about a cousin of his who was returning from a fair on just such a dark night as this one. It seemed that the cousin, John Duffy by name, had driven to the fair in a cart with a young horse which had never been in harness before. After selling his cattle at the fair, Duffy remained on in the town drinking heavily until it was dark, and then started to drive home alone. Just outside the next village on his way home there was an ass rolling in the middle of the road. The young horse promptly shied, started to bolt, broke the rotten old harness, and galloped off home, leaving Duffy alone in the cart.

At this point of the story Brogan got mixed up with fairies, who seemed to have suddenly appeared on the road, covered Duffy with straw, and put him to sleep. At dawn Duffy awoke, and proceeded to drag the cart into the village, where he stopped outside the shop of the principal shopkeeper, Anthony Ray. Here Duffy knocked at the door, until at last old Ray came down and opened it, when the following conversation was carried on :

Ray. “ What do you want at this hour of the morning, John Duffy ? ”

Duffy. “ Mr. Ray, sir, I wants to know am I John Duffy or am I not ? ”

Ray. “ And what the devil do ye want to know for, ye drunken auld fool ? ”

Duffy. “ Because, Mr. Ray, yer honour, if I’m John Duffy I’ve lost a fine young horse baste, and if I’m not I’ve found a damn bad cart.”

By this time the moon had risen, and the last part of the drive along the edge of the Atlantic was most beautiful. The sea had quite gone down, and only the usual long slow breakers of the ocean broke at intervals on the beach. On every side could be heard the wild cries of sea-birds, always restless and seeking fresh feeding-ground ; while at one point we passed within a stone’s-throw of six herons, motionless as rocks, and standing out large and dark against the background of silvery water.

Mrs. Brogan met us at some distance from the lodge, full of anxiety to know what had delayed us ; and it appeared that the road was notorious for ghosts, especially a little old woman dressed in white, who could patter along the road as fast as any horse ever foaled could gallop, though this seemed to be the extent of her evil.

Charles politely assured Mrs. Brogan that we had seen no ghost and that we were quite all right, except that Brogan had got drunk. “ Ah not at all,” replied the good woman. “ Mickey’s never drunk until he goes down to the river to light his pipe, and thin he’s real drunk.”

This was too much for Charles, who retired to bed without an answer.

III

THE following day we did not see Brogan until after lunch, when he put his head in at the sitting-room door to know if we would want him the next day, as he was anxious to go to a fair to sell some mountain sheep ; and when we said he could go by all means, he asked if we would care to go with him.

Charles declined, being still angry with Brogan after our wild drive of the previous night, but I decided to go. Brogan seemed pleased, and said that if I would ride we could take a short cut across country, and so save several miles.

The next morning Brogan and I started at an unearthly hour in the pitch dark—so dark, in fact, that I could not see a yard in front of me, and simply trusted to the pony following Brogan. Soon after the dawn broke we struck a mountain road, which eventually brought us to a cross-roads, where we turned left-handed on to the main road, which led to the little town where the fair was to be held.

At the cross-roads I noticed a lot of feathers and straw littered about. Brogan explained that a fowl fair had been held there during the night, and on my expressing surprise at the strangeness of the

hour to hold a fair, he could give no explanation except that it was an old custom, and that fowl fairs had always been held at midnight as long as he could remember. One had often heard the Irish expression to buy a pig in a poke, but in this part of Ireland to buy a fowl in the dark would seem to be more appropriate.

After leaving the cross-roads we began to meet country people going to the fair, many of them riding pillion on the same breed of ponies as we rode—dun-coloured ponies with queer dark-brown stripes on the shoulders and down the middle of the back like a donkey, but in no other respects did they resemble a donkey, being fine hardy beasts, much like the best class of Welsh mountain ponies. All carried the same plaited straw saddles and rope bridles, the men being dressed in dark-grey home-spuns, and the women with their skirts carefully pinned up, showing their brilliant red-flannel petticoats, dark shawls over their heads. Most quaint they looked, the women solemnly holding on to their men's waists, and carrying large baskets of eggs and butter balanced on their laps.

Near the town we overtook Brogan's son driving a small flock of mountain sheep, with Paddy doing sheep-dog, and we all proceeded to the fair together. Every street of the queer little town seemed to be used as a fair green, and the place was full of small black-faced mountain sheep and shaggy red and black mountain cattle, when Brogan and his flock took up their position in the square in the middle of the town.

Buying seemed to be brisk, and shortly after we had arrived a dealer asked Brogan how much he wanted for the sheep. The price did not appear to suit the dealer, who went off remarking that it was sheep he wanted to buy, not bullocks. However, he returned again shortly, and opened negotiations with Brogan afresh, and it was most amusing to watch them—Brogan pretending to be quite indifferent whether he sold or not, and the dealer quite indifferent whether he bought the sheep or left them. In fact, to hear the talk you would have imagined that each was conferring a favour on the other. After interminable arguments on the merits and demerits of the sheep, they reached a point where there was only a difference of two shillings a sheep between them, and now they really began to warm to their work, Brogan shouting that he would leave them on the street before he would let them go at the dealer's price, and the dealer retorting that he could buy Roscommon rams at Brogan's price. At this point a third man appeared on the scene, and in a coaxing voice entreated the by now furious pair to divide the difference. Brogan at once consigned the arbitrator to blazes, and the dealer, after consigning Brogan and the arbitrator to the same place, started to move off. But the arbitrator held him firm by his coat-tails, and the argument started all over again, if possible more furiously than ever. At last the price was fixed, the difference being divided, and I thought that the sheep were really sold at last.

But not at all. A fresh and fierce dispute now

started as to the amount of "luck penny" which Brogan should give back to the dealer. Again the arbitrator saved the situation, and at his suggestion we all adjourned to Mrs. Mulligan's public house to settle the "luck penny," and to drink it in porter.

Mrs. Mulligan's pub. was packed with country people, most of them drinking porter, and all of them talking at the top of their voices, and it was only by dint of pushing and elbowing our way through the mass of people that we could get inside the door at all. There had been a few showers during the morning, so that the women's shawls were steaming in the hot room, and the air was close with the acrid smell of turf smoke from the drying homespun clothes of the men.

Apparently the dealer was a man of some importance, as we were at once led upstairs to Mrs. Mulligan's bedroom to drink our porter; and as we left the crowded room downstairs, I could hear a little old man near the door, amid shouts of laughter from the crowd, asking "If any man knew of a bottle of porter wanting a good home."

I soon found the atmosphere of Mrs. Mulligan's bedroom too much for me, and after arranging with Brogan to meet him at the stable where we had put up our ponies, I went off to buy some homespun I had noticed on a stall in the main street. Along both sides of the main street and in the square there were many stalls and several queer-looking tents, rather like the half-round shelters which you see gipsies living in on an English common: at the stalls were sold homespuns, tin kettles and pans, and

rosaries chiefly ; while at the corner of two streets a loud-voiced man, mounted on a cart, was auctioning shoddy-looking harness, secondhand clothes and American watches. In the square a huge black negro, with a grin from ear to ear and a diamond tie-pin the size of the Koh-i-noor, was offering to extract any tooth painlessly, " yes, sure."

On investigation I found that the queer tents, called whisky-tents by the people, contained old women and many whisky bottles, and were full of the overflow from the crowded public-houses.

On getting back to the lodge we found that one of the game-watchers, McKensie by name, who lived on one of the outlying beats of the shooting, had arrived with the news that his mountain was full of woodcock, or, as he quaintly put it, " they were as plentiful as midges in summer." And after McKensie had had whisky from us, poteen from Brogan, and tea from Mrs. Brogan, it was settled that we would be at McKensie's cottage as early as possible the next morning, and would shoot his mountain.

We started for McKensie's mountain in the grey dawn of what Brogan described as a fine " saft " day, but Charles called a devilish wet day. Brogan had produced another shaggy pony for Charles to ride, while young Brogan walked and carried the game bags. The going was bad, most of the way over bogs and mountain streams, and it must have taken us nearly two hours to reach McKensie's cottage, a miserable ill-kept hovel, with not even a chimney, but simply a hole in the roof to let out

the smoke, and only one very small window, which did not open. When we reached the cottage there was no sign of life, and the door shut tight, so Brogan dismounted and hammered at the door, while his son knocked at the window. After a considerable time the door opened slowly, to emit a cloud of turf smoke, followed by a shower of hens, a pig, a calf, and lastly, McKensie himself, rubbing his eyes with one hand and buttoning up his coat with the other. After another interval Mrs. McKensie appeared, followed by a swarm of half-naked children, and one shuddered to think what the atmosphere must be like in such a cottage at night with the door and window shut tight and no chimney. I tried to go into the cottage, but could not face the turf smoke. When the door was open, as much smoke went out by the door as by the hole in the roof, though the greater part seemed to stay in the cottage.

During the ride out to McKensie's, Brogan told us that often about this time of the year the herds on the mountains along the Atlantic sea-board would come across a flight of woodcock, generally in a patch of thick heather in a sheltered sunny spot, in a place where the day before their sheep-dogs had not put up a single bird. He seemed to think that these flights fly right across Ireland until they see, or if it be night-time feel by some peculiar sense, that they have reached the extremity of the land, and that the broad Atlantic lies before them. The birds then pitch themselves down in the nearest covert or thick heather within sight, and then rest

until they have recovered from their exhausting journey, which may be any length of time from twenty-four to forty-eight hours. When they have rested, the woodcock spread inland singly and take up their winter quarters on the mountain-slopes and the numerous coverts to the eastward.

We had brought the setters and Paddy with us, and, after arming McKensie's two biggest boys with hazel sticks, we started to walk up the mountain at the back of McKensie's cottage, and after a stiff climb reached the place where McKensie had seen the woodcock the previous day.

About half-way up the mountain-side we came to a narrow flat facing to the south, well sheltered from the west winds, and to-day bathed in sunshine. Most of the flat was covered with thick heather, in places nearly up to our middle. We started to walk the flat in line, and at once the dogs flushed six woodcock together. Though most of the shots were fairly easy, yet the bad going through the high heather and over hidden boulders soon tired us, and made us miss more birds than we ought to have done. As sure as one slipped on some hidden mossy rock did there arise a yell of " 'cock " from the beaters. Generally the bird rose just in front of the beaters, but when one had regained one's balance it was fifty to seventy yards away, skimming low over the heather. Nevertheless by the time we had got to the end of the flat we had shot thirty-two woodcock and ten hares. We tried several likely places afterwards, but only saw a single woodcock, though we got several grouse, and

at one rocky place had great shooting in a colony of queer little grey rabbits.

During lunch Brogan pointed to a golden eagle, at first only a tiny speck high up in the sky ; but as the bird drew nearer, it gradually began to look huge ; and though it appeared to be sailing majestically on dead wing, yet we could easily see that in reality it was travelling at a great pace. While we were resting in the heather after lunch McKensie told us wonderful yarns of eagles carrying off fair-sized children from under their mothers' noses, and assured us that in the days when eagles were plentiful in these parts it used to be most dangerous for small children to wear red petticoats in the mountain districts. It seemed that red was as fascinating a colour to eagles as it was maddening to bulls. He added that every year he saw fewer eagles, and that now he only knew of one pair which built regularly in his neighbourhood.

After lunch we gradually worked our way back to McKensie's cottage, but after leaving the flat where the flight of woodcock had pitched we did not see a single woodcock—only a few grouse and a fair number of hares. Though Mrs. McKensie was most anxious to give us tea, I failed to get Charles to face the smoke barrage in the chimneyless cottage, and we at once mounted our ponies and started for home. Riding home, I asked Brogan what would become of the McKensie children when they grew up, and he answered, “ Sure won't Americy take as many boys and girls as we will send them ? ”

That evening after supper was over and Brogan was drinking whisky-and-water with us, or rather I should say whisky, as he did not think water wholesome with whisky—"The whisky to-day and the water to-morrow," he said to Charles the first night at the lodge when Charles offered him a drink—he asked us if we would care to go with him to a village in the mountains about ten miles inland, where they ran a still every day of the week except Sundays, and assured us that Jameson's Distillery above in Dublin did not brew half as much whisky in the year as was made in this village. He added that it was a famous village entirely, as it was reputed to have produced more priests and "poteen" than any other village in the west of Ireland. Charles asked what was the connection between priests and "poteen," and Brogan explained, "Sure yer honour's simple: doesn't "poteen" make money, and doesn't it take money to make a priest?" We agreed to go, but Charles insisted that we should ride. Afterwards he told me that nothing would ever induce him to drive with Brogan again on an outside car, either by day or night, after our wild night's drive back from flight-shooting.

After a late breakfast we started on our ten-mile ride to the famous priest-and—"poteen"-village. There had been a slight frost the previous night, and the day was perfect, a brilliant cloudless blue sky and a bright sun. When we left the lodge the Atlantic looked like the Mediterranean, while so clear was the air that one could count the rocks on

McKensie's Home.



the mountains more than three miles away. There was not a breath of wind, and we could hear the Atlantic rollers breaking on the beach long after we left the lodge.

During the ride Brogan explained some of the mysteries of "poteen"-making: that you could make it from barley or brown sugar—treacle he called it. That the poteen made from barley was far better than that made from treacle, but that if you used barley you had either to buy or grow it, and in either case the police became unpleasantly inquisitive: while on the other hand, treacle was easily bought from a shopkeeper, and nobody was any the wiser.

At one time the police used to give a large reward for information leading to the seizure of a still, and Brogan told us that one man made a fortune by giving information to the police. First he gave a contract to a travelling tinker to make a lot of stills at a low price, and after leaving these stills in different places with the remains of a fire, would lodge his information and claim the rewards.

When we began to get near the village, which lay in the middle of a large flat bog and at a ford across a river, we noticed several bare-legged children partly hidden in the heather at different points. Brogan explained that all the children of the village were carefully trained by an ex-soldier to act as scouts, and that they never allowed the police or any stranger to approach near the village when a still was being run without giving timely warning.

On arrival at the village we found a still in full

blast in an old road, which ran down to the river, two men working at the still, while several children brought turf in creels on donkeys in a continuous flow to keep the fire going.

After a time we adjourned to a cottage for refreshment. Brogan insisted on my drinking a glass of "poteen"—which made me cough and reel, while Charles, after refusing "poteen," gladly accepted a mug of milk from the woman of the house. It turned out afterwards that Brogan, expecting that Charles would refuse to drink the "poteen," had heavily "laced" the mug of milk with "poteen," with the result that the usually staid and sober Charles rode back to the lodge at a hand-gallop, and singing at the top of his voice, to the huge delight of Brogan.

The next day being Sunday, Brogan suggested a fox-hunt in the mountains: and it was finally settled that we should ride out after breakfast to the cottage of a man called Tim O'Hara, who lived in a lonely glen beyond McKensie's cottage.

IV

WHEN we were ready to start on our ride to O'Hara's, we found that Brogan had sent his son the previous evening to borrow two fox-terriers from the parson of the town where we had previously attended the fair. The two terriers knew well that there was sport ahead, and were mad keen to get a move on.

About two miles beyond McKensie's cottage we came to the glen where the O'Haras lived. The cottage was neat and tidy, with good out-buildings — a great contrast to the McKensies' dirty and untidy home. Brogan told us that about twenty years previously O'Hara built his cottage in the glen himself, and had reclaimed all the land we saw under cultivation, and laid it down in grass. Mrs. O'Hara gave us a great welcome, and told us "that it was time them dirty blackguards of foxes were hunted out of that. Sure every morning before I let out me hins I do be after hunting the little garden with the dogs, for fear one of them rotten foxes could be waiting for the hins." Presently O'Hara and his son joined us with a sheep-dog, and we set out for the home of the "dirty blackguards," but we had not gone far when Tiny and Nettle were found to be missing, so the Brogan boy was

sent back to the cottage. Presently he returned with the terriers tied, but doing their utmost to get back to the cottage. During our short absence they had had a great hunt after the O'Hara cats, finally "treeing" them up a four-poster bed ; and when the Brogan boy arrived Nettle was trying to run up one of the bedposts, while Tiny waited below for the victims.

The fox-den was situated in a great pile of rocks on a ledge on the mountain-side, and was one of the most desolate places imaginable. The place was a wilderness of moss, bog, and granite, barren beyond description, while the dreariness of the waste was indescribable.

At the time there was an east-wind haze over the mountains, which created a sense of great distances. Even the rocks quite close looked to be in the dim distance—a wonderful change, even in this ever-changing land, from the days we had lately experienced.

On our way to the fox-den we passed the body of a dead mountain sheep. Several ravens and grey crows, which were feasting on the carcase, rose reluctantly when we were within a few yards of them, and returned again directly we had passed.

After warning us to be quiet, Brogan let loose the terriers, and they went to ground at once without a sound. After a short time we could hear a faint excited whimper deep down in the heart of the den, and almost at once a fine dog-fox stole out the side of the den away from where we were standing. O'Hara's dog, Kruger, at once gave chase, and,

as the fox went down the side of the mountain below us, we had a fine view of the hunt. Kruger gained slowly on the fox, and before the "dirty blackguard" had gone four hundred yards, overtook and closed with him. Then ensued a great battle between the two. In the meantime the terriers had emerged from the den, and taking up the scent, at once flung themselves down the mountain-side in hot pursuit like dogs possessed, and giving tongue for all they were worth: but before they could join in the fray Kruger had finished the fox.

We then moved on to another den, and this time only Tiny was allowed to go to ground. After a considerable time we could hear the muffled barks of Tiny, and as no fox bolted Nettle was let in.

Then ensued long alternate periods of barking and silence, and O'Hara said that he was afraid that the terriers had run into an old badger and could not move him, and it would be black dark before we could get them out. However, after about two hours' waiting, out ambled a great old badger—O'Hara said afterwards that he was as big as a calf—followed by the terriers, a mass of mud and blood, and so exhausted that they could only lie down and pant. We found that the badger had bitten Nettle badly, and so weak was she that we had to carry her back to the cottage, and, after washing her wounds, give her warm milk and raw eggs.

After tea we started for home, Brogan carrying Nettle in a game-bag, being greatly afraid that the parson would never lend him the terriers again.

Tiny, however, had quite recovered before we left the O'Haras'; and, to show us how fit he was, insisted on having another dart at the cats.

Before we got back to the lodge the wind veered to the S.E., and the rain started in earnest. We were thankful to get back to a hot bath and dry clothes. During the next three days the rain never stopped, and we began to think there might be something in the story of the widow's curse.

Our housekeeping arrangements at this period were greatly upset by the death of a relation of Mrs. Brogan, the "wake" lasting for three days and three nights and seeming to be always claiming her attention, so much so that when I at last remonstrated with her, the good woman burst into tears, and told me that "Sure anyone might forget their memory and me being up three nights at the wake." Brogan, however, cheered us greatly with the good news that, as soon as the rain should quit we would have grand snipe-shooting; also that the priest had insisted on Mrs. Brogan's relation being buried at once—and "not a day too soon," he added.

Our best snipe-ground consisted of a long narrow valley running from the foot of the mountains to the sea, a distance of several miles. Up to the time of the Great Famine it had been thickly inhabited, and along its whole length the remains of many cottages could still be seen. A little river ran through the middle of the valley, and on each bank were the remains of the former tenants' cultivations, now rushy wet grassland, with all the drains chocked up, and making splendid snipe-

ground. On the outskirts of this rushy ground were many small marshes, and beyond great heathery flats running up to the foot of the mountains—in short, every kind of ground a snipe could desire for feeding or resting.

The first time we shot this ground was on a close day, with a darkish sky and a light west wind, and the snipe seemed to be affected by the heaviness of the atmosphere. Many of them, especially where the cover was thick, lay like stones, some of them so close that when they rose a sheet would have covered bird, setter, and gun.

Before we started to shoot, Brogan gave us a lecture on snipe-shooting, and we afterwards proved the soundness of his advice by the good bags we made. He made a great point of not talking and of going slow, and of always shooting across the wind when possible. The great advantage of keeping silent was brought home to us when Charles, in his excitement, yelled to the Brogan boy to bring him some more cartridges. At the sound of his voice every snipe in the small marsh we were shooting at the time rose with a screech and well out of shot.

Brogan only worked one setter at a time, and Grouse, true to his name, was always inclined to wander off into the heather in search of grouse; while Fan, the steadier setter of the two, always stuck to the snipe-ground.

Along the stream and in some of the wetter marshes we put up several mallard and teal, while in the heather Grouse found several packs of grouse and half a dozen woodcock. We saw a few

hares during the day and two "stands" of golden plover, out of one of which we brought down fourteen birds with our four barrels. Curlew we saw and heard frequently, but got few shots at this wariest of all wild birds. It was curious to see how these birds, if they did not notice us, would pursue and mob a red setter, most likely thinking it was some kind of fox, and on one occasion a flock of curlew were so occupied with abusing Fan that they nearly flew into our faces before they realized the danger they were in.

Hawks we saw in plenty, peregrines, sparrow-hawks, and kestrels. On two occasions we were followed for considerable distances by a hen sparrow-hawk, and on the second occasion the hawk swooped and picked up a dead snipe which Charles had shot, and which had fallen dead on a patch of bright green grass about two hundred yards ahead of us. We saw a fair number of jack snipe, chiefly in the marshes, and while some were easy to shoot, others seemed impossible to bring down. Charles had a great hunt after one elusive jack, and at last he gave up, saying he was sure the bird flew through the pattern every time.

During the day we came across the strangest human being and the strangest human habitation I have ever seen. Right out in the middle of a large bog lived a little old woman, with a few hens, in a house the country people had made for her by cutting sods out of the bog itself, and piling them one on top of the other to form the walls; while the roof consisted of half a dozen pieces of wood

with the same sods laid on them. A hole in the roof served to let out the smoke. The door consisted of a small hole in the wall, while the level of the floor was below the level of the ground outside. Brogan told us that so old was she that she had outlived all her children and even her grandchildren, and I could well believe it from her appearance. I have never seen such deep lines or such a shrivelled-up look on the face of any living person. Brogan told us that she used to talk of the Rebellion of 1798, but that it was no use asking her questions as she was stone-deaf and "had no English." Several families had offered her a home, but she preferred to live alone, with her few old hens and a cat, in her own hovel in the bog—such is the love of possession in the heart of every Irish peasant.

We shot as long as there was any light, and the number of snipe we saw was truly wonderful ; but the great charm of the shooting was the variety of game and never knowing what would get up next. On our way home in the dusk we could hear flock after flock of widgeon flying overhead on their way to the sea—the first widgeon we had heard or seen since we arrived.

When out shooting we often used to see large flocks of white-fronted geese, sometimes flying in great V's to some wet meadow-lands close to the mouth of the river which ran past the lodge, and also resting during the daytime in different bogs ; but, though we had often tried to stalk them, so far we had always failed to get within shot. It

used to be most interesting to watch a large flock of geese resting in the middle of a bog. Some would appear to be sound asleep, standing on one leg, with their heads tucked under a wing ; while others would be going through an elaborate toilet, cleaning every feather of their bodies and wings which they could reach with their supple necks. Every flock had a sentry posted in the most advantageous position, and through the glasses one could see the sentry scanning every point of danger in the bog unceasingly ; but once we nearly succeeded in outwitting a sentry. While we were watching a flock two children, driving donkeys with creels on their backs to draw turf from a stack close to where we were hidden, passed within easy shot of the geese, the sentry taking no notice of them at all. After the children had filled the creels we walked back with them, crouching on the blind side of the donkeys. All went well until we came within about 120 yards of the flock, when the sentry, who must have noticed that the donkeys had suddenly grown a pair of stocking legs in addition to their own, gave a low cackle. At once there was a dead silence, and every goose's head went up ; and before we had gone another five yards the whole flock was up and off.

Coming in from snipe-shooting one evening, we noticed a sudden and great change in the air and sky. There was a bitter sting in the north-west wind, and the whole sky to the north and west was a wonderful vivid duck-egg green colour, with heavy fleecy white clouds on the skyline to sea. During

the day the snipe had been growing wilder and wilder, while all the duck and geese in the country seemed to be making their way to the Atlantic. The next morning when I woke up my bedroom was full of a brilliant white light, and when I looked out of the window the country was covered with a mantle of snow. We thought that our shooting was at an end, for the time being, but far from it.

It seemed that during the snow the only feeding-ground the geese had was on the wet meadow-land near the mouth of the river. In the middle of this ground were several springs, and here Brogan had made hiding-places built of low sod walls.

That evening, about an hour before the moon rose, we proceeded to our hiding-places, and we must have presented a queer sight. Mrs. Brogan possessed three white nightgowns, and we each wore one, while she had made during the day a white cap for each of us out of an old sheet. The remainder of the sheet had been used to make a weird garment for Paddy, which converted him into a complete white Irish water-s spaniel, with a pair of yellow eyes. Even his bare tail was covered. I told Charles that the least he could do was to offer Mrs. Brogan the loan of a pair of his pyjamas in return.

Very soon after the moon had risen the geese began to flight into the meadow-land in small flocks ; and long before we could see their dark forms against the brilliant steel-coloured sky we heard their queer silly laugh, while several flocks

flew so low that we could distinctly see them yards away, black against the white snow.

The cold seemed to have temporarily lulled the geeses' keen sense of caution, or perhaps hunger made them foolhardy. At any rate, hardly any of the flocks took their usual precaution of carefully examining every inch of the ground they were going to alight on from a safe height.

If we had done badly before with the geese, we now made up for it, and hardly a flock got clear of the meadow-land that night without losing a member of its mess. At first we were too eager and tried to shoot the geese coming at us, but after a warning from Brogan we waited until the birds were overhead or gave us side shots. Their breasts resist shot like a sandbag. Paddy was invaluable, and in the moonlight looked like a ghost dog carrying in a goose from the swampy springs.

Brogan told us that on the west coast they seldom had any very hard weather during the winter, but that when they did, every woodcock, snipe, plover and goose in the west of Ireland would make his way to the shores of the Atlantic, and could be seen there every day turning over the seaweed in search of food, and as tame as hens. If the hard weather lasted any length of time, they became so weak that the country boys used to kill the snipe and woodcock with sticks by the hundred.

During the long winter evenings peasants used to visit the Brogans, often from great distances, and sometimes even from the outlying islands of the Atlantic, and Brogan would often bring them into

the sitting-room to entertain us with their queer stories. One story an islander told amused us greatly.

Many years ago on the island where he lived there was not a single horse, and one inhabitant, more enterprising than the rest, determined to make a journey to the mainland and bring back a "hoss baste" with him. However, he found that his purse would not run to a horse, but he determined not to return empty-handed. Among many wonderful new things he saw in the little town he was visiting was an earthen jar in a shop window. He inquired what this unknown article might be, and to his great delight the shopkeeper told him that it was a mare's egg, which, if kept beside the fire during the winter, would infallibly produce in the following spring the finest foal that ever was seen. The price was moderate and the islander decided to buy the jar. On the return journey the happy man never let the jar out of his own hands until he came within sight of his own house, when he sat down to rest, and placed the jar on a bank beside him.

Unfortunately the jar rolled off the bank, struck a rock, and was broken to pieces. A hare, which had been crouching beneath the rock, startled at the crash, sprang out from her form and went off at great speed. The unhappy islander, in an agony of despair, gazed after what he believed to be his emancipated foal, and exclaimed with a bitter groan: "God be with me! What a hoss he would have been. Arrah, if he was but a

two year old, the Devil himself could not catch him."

We had promised Mary that we would be home for Christmas, and as towards the middle of December the weather became bad and the best of the snipe-shooting was then over, we determined to leave the shooting-lodge. On a wild December morning Larry came with his Ford to take us on our long journey to the station, and we parted with the Brogans with mutual regrets on both sides, and after promising to return the following summer for the fishing. Charles and I both agreed that never had we had better sport or a pleasanter time in our lives.

PART II

I

ENGLISH people, who have once come under the spell of the fascinating and ever-changing beauty of the West of Ireland, used to return there year after year—some for fishing and shooting, while others went simply to enjoy the wonderful beauty of the scenery, which is never the same for two days in succession, and will even change completely in the course of a few hours, owing to the sudden and violent changes in the atmospheric conditions of the Atlantic. And though the scenery is naturally grand and wild, yet there is no doubt that its chief charm lies in the wonderful lights and shades of colour imparted to mountain and moor by these peculiar atmospheric conditions, largely caused by the close proximity of the Gulf Stream.

Hardly had my brother Charles and I returned from our shooting trip in the West of Ireland than we began to make plans for a fishing trip there the following summer ; and before a month had passed we had determined to include spring fishing if possible, and finally to put in an autumn's pike-fishing on some of the great western lakes, and to wind up with another winter's shooting.

Unfortunately we showed too great an enthusiasm, with the result that our sister Mary announced her intention of accompanying us on this trip and seeing for herself this wonderful country about which she said we were always raving—which meant that Mary's dog Dash, a black spaniel, over-fed and under-disciplined from its youth, would surely make a fourth.

Charles hastily tried to explain to her that the western climate of Ireland was far too damp for dogs, and that all the dogs we had seen there were martyrs to rheumatism; further, that the dogs there, like the natives, were ever ready to fight, and that there was no limit to the number of bites allowed to these savage dogs by Irish law. But it was too late, and Mary again expressed her intention of taking the dog, and that was the end of it.

Once more Mary rifled all the secondhand book-shops she knew of, not only for books on the West of Ireland, but for old treatises on the gentle art of angling, and again we were nightly regaled with extracts from these old books—some amusing, others trying.

Though not a fisherwoman nor by any means stupid, yet even Mary was greatly puzzled by the following fishing story, which she found in one of these old Irish books and read out to us, in spite of the groans of Charles.

“ The voracity of the pike is most strongly exemplified in the following extract from a provincial newspaper. Of the truth of the occurrence we

presume that there can be no reasonable doubt, even in the minds of the most sceptical ; but we believe that there is no instance of animal ferocity on record which could parallel it, excepting the celebrated case of the Kilkenny cats, whose respective demolition of each other is as wonderful as it is authentic. A party of anglers on one of the large lakes in Connaught made one of its members to sit across the head of the boat as a punishment inflicted on him for wearing his spurs when on a fishing expedition. Another, having caught a small perch, stuck it on one of the spurs, which he (the delinquent in the bow) not perceiving, in a few minutes an enormous pike bit at the perch, and the spur, being crane-necked, entangled in the gills of the pike, which, in attempting to extricate itself, actually pulled the unfortunate person out of the boat. He was with difficulty dragged on shore and the pike taken, which was found to be of prodigious size. Now, after this cautionary notice of ours, we do assert that any gentleman who goes to fish in crane-necks, and disposes of his legs overboard with a perch on the rowel, is not exactly the person on whose life, were we agents to a company, we should feel justified in effecting a policy of insurance."

And to increase our knowledge of fishing we were given the following "maxims of fishing," in spite of Charles's protests that he already knew quite well how to fish.

" Do not imagine that, because a fish does not instantly dart off on seeing you, he is less aware

of your presence ; he almost always on such occasions ceases to feed and pays you the compliment of devoting his whole attention to you, whilst he is preparing for a start whenever the apprehended danger becomes sufficiently imminent.

“ If you pass your fly neatly and well three times over a trout, and he refuses it, do not wait any longer for him ; you may be sure he has seen the line of invitation which you have sent over the water to him, and does not intend to answer.

“ Remember that, in whipping with the artificial fly, it must have time when you have drawn it out of the water to make the whole circuit, and to be at one time straight behind you before it can be driven out straight before you. If you give it the forward impulse too soon, you will hear a crack ; take this as a hint that your fly has gone to grass.

“ It appears to me that, in whipping with an artificial fly, there are only two courses in which a fish taking the fly will infallibly hook himself without your assistance—viz., first, when your fly touches the water at the end of a straight rod ; second, when you are drawing your fly for a new throw. In all other cases it is necessary that, in order to hook him when he has taken the fly, you should do something with your wrist which is not easy to describe.

“ If your line should fall loose or wavy into the water, it will either frighten away the fish, or he will take the fly into his mouth without fastening himself ; and when he finds that it will not answer

his purpose, he will spit it out again before it has answered yours.

“Never mind what they of the old school say about ‘playing him until he is tired’—much and valuable time and many a good fish may be lost by this antiquated proceeding. Put him into your basket as soon as you can. Everything depends on the manner in which you commence your acquaintance with him. If you can at first prevail upon him to walk a little way down-stream with you, you will have no difficulty afterwards in persuading him to let you have the pleasure of seeing him at dinner.

“Do not leave off fishing early in the evening because your friends are tired. After a bright day, the largest fish are to be caught by whipping between sunset and dark. Even, however, in these precious moments you will not have good sport if you continue throwing after you have whipped your fly off. Pay attention to this; and, if you have any doubt after dusk, you may easily ascertain the point by drawing the end of the line quickly through your hand, particularly if you do not wear gloves.

“When you have got hold of a good fish, which is not very tractable, if you are married, gentle reader, think of your wife, who, like the fish, is united to you by very tender ties, which can only end with her death, or her going into weeds. If you are single, the loss of the fish, when you thought the prize your own, may remind you of some more serious disappointment.”

Much as Charles and I would have liked to return to the Brogans' shooting-lodge, yet, on talking the matter over, we decided that it would be wiser to try and find a house with better accommodation, as Mary and Dash were to be of the party. I was sorry not to go to the Brogans' again, but was quite sure that if we did Paddy or Grouse would eat Dash, and that all hope of peace and quiet would be gone for ever as long as Mary remained at the lodge.

Advertisements in the *Field* and *Irish Times* brought us shoals of the usual answers—after our previous experience of advertising for a shooting Charles had suggested that it might be as well to advertise for a hunting-box or a poultry farm—in fact, every hard-up landlord in the whole of the South and West appeared to be anxious to let us his house.

At last, when we were in despair, a letter came from an undertaker in the West, who, from the printed inscriptions at the top of his writing-paper, appeared to out-Whiteley Whiteley. He sold the best Irish and Scotch whisky, also Guinness's XXX stout; would bury you and provide a fitting tombstone, mourning coaches a speciality. If you wanted a castle or a cabin, he could give you a grand selection; was agent for German pianos and American reaping-machines and Belgian bicycles; and lastly, supplied fresh bread twice a week at your door, and rejoiced in the name of Paddy Mulligan.

Mr. Mulligan begged to offer us the finest sporting

estate in the West of Ireland, situated amidst romantic scenery ; the best of spring fishing, also grilse and sea-trout fishing ; an unique old Irish house, with a full staff of servants inside and out ; in fact, as Mr. Mulligan put it, the place might have walked straight out of one of Charles Lever's books.

Charles was preparing methodically to file this letter with the others, when Mary, who had by now started to read Lever, and was in the middle of "Charles O'Malley," intervened, and insisted that it was just the place we were looking for—did not Mr. Mulligan say that the fishing was of the very best, and she would never be happy until she had lived in a real "Rackrent Hall."

Charles and I did our best—we offered to take her abroad, even round the world, and recklessly threw in Dash in our agony, but it was quite useless ; that very evening it was decided that we should take up our abode at "Rackrent Hall" as soon as the mere detail of rent could be fixed. And Mary refused to go to bed until the letter to Mr. Mulligan had been written. Charles sulked for fully a week, but that only made Mary more determined, and we had to make up our minds to make the best of it.

We still had hopes that Mr. Mulligan might ask a preposterous rent ; but his reply, which came by return of post, killed this last hope of escape. It appeared that the place belonged to an old couple who came of the "real old quality," and who had spent their lives there, but now had suddenly been ordered abroad by the doctor on account of the old lady's health. The place, all the sporting

rights, fishing and shooting, would be let for half nothing to careful tenants, and the wages of all the servants would be paid by the owners.

Charles remarked that it was useless to fight against fate, and that he only prayed that the fishing might turn out to be a quarter as good as Mulligan's account made out.

During the next few days we spent most of our time in fishing-tackle shops, and fitted ourselves out for every kind of fishing ; luckily Mary showed no inclination to fish, confining her attention to panoramic cameras and books.

At last we got started, going by the night mail from Euston, and on arriving at Holyhead proceeded to board the mail-boat. Here Mary met her match in the form of an Irish steward. Charles, seeing the coming storm, disappeared at once, muttering something about seeing after the luggage.

Mary had made up her mind that Dash was to sleep with her in a cabin, which had been ordered by wire, in order that she might attend to the dog if he was sea-sick, whilst the steward was equally firm that Dash was to make the voyage in the cook's galley.

Mary replied that cooks always gave dogs bones, and that bones and the smell of cooking were bound to make Dash both ill and sea-sick.

At this point I stupidly suggested that Mary might like to stay with Dash in the cook's galley, to look after him and to make certain that the cook gave him no bones, only to be told to mind my own business.

A complete deadlock appeared imminent, and we looked like spending the voyage arguing in the gangway with the steward. Then the wily Irishman suggested that, as it was a fine night (it wasn't), Mary might like to sit up on deck and keep the dog with her. Honours were now easy, and after wrapping Mary up in rugs, I retired to the warmth of the smoking-room.

We did not see Charles again until the boat was moored alongside the pier at Kingstown, when he informed us that he had spent most of the night searching the boat for us, and that he had been quite anxious.

We missed the early morning breakfast-train from the Broadstone Station to the West owing to some infernal box containing Dash's kit being lost, and found ourselves with several hours to wait in Dublin. After breakfast at the "Shelbourne," Charles and I left Mary and Dash there, and set out to try and hire or buy a car.

It would appear that in Ireland, if you want to buy a motor-car and the shopkeeper has not got one for sale, nothing will induce him to say so; on the contrary, he will at once offer to sell you something else, quite ignoring the fact that you have asked for a motor—it may be a sewing-machine, and, on the other hand, it may be a self-binding reaping-machine.

And so we found it in Dublin. On entering the first motor-shop we found, and asking the man if he had a car for hire, he counter-attacked by trying to palm off on us an ancient motor-bicycle and

side-car ; and when we firmly refused he switched on to a motor-mowing-machine in a perfectly natural and easy manner, as though conferring a favour on us.

After trying in vain at five different shops to hire a decent car, we determined to buy a new Ford ; and, after making the necessary arrangements for the car to be sent on after us, we returned to the hotel to collect Mary.

As we were leaving the hotel a housemaid came running after Mary, holding in her fingers a bright new farthing, which she handed to Mary with the remark that “ perhaps her ladyship might be setting some value on this little coin.” For a second Mary did not understand, then realizing that she must have given the girl the bright new farthing in mistake for a sixpence, she handed the girl a shilling, and walked out of the hotel with her nose in the air, followed by the grinning Charles. On our way to the station Charles remarked that he had never heard a better criticism of the amount of a tip, and Mary could only retort that the girl was a hussy.

Our journey lay due west, and we could not help noticing the wonderful vivid green of the fields after England, and, as on our former trip, the complete lack of any beauty in the landscape of the centre of Ireland.

But the farther west we went the wilder grew the scenery, until at last the train passed through an endless panorama of mountains, lakes, and great valleys, and everywhere an indescribable softness

and air of mystery. Villages and farm-houses grew smaller and smaller and fewer and fewer, until we seemed to be passing into an uninhabited wilderness ; only at rare intervals could one detect with difficulty an odd small low cottage hiding itself in some sheltered valley.

At long intervals the train would stop at some station, built for no apparent reason in the midst of an open moor. For several minutes nothing would happen ; then, very slowly and with endless chatter, quaint brown-faced women, covered with shawls and showing brilliant scarlet-flannel petticoats, their skirts pinned up high out of harm's way, and carrying large empty baskets, would descend from the train. The station and train staffs would at once start an animated political argument, which one began to think would never end, until suddenly the guard would take a notion to blow his whistle frantically, and we would pull slowly out of the station, while the station-master and engine-driver would endeavour to get in the last word of the argument at the top of their voices.

At last we reached our destination—a tiny grey station on the shores of a lake hemmed in on all sides by mountains—and found a convoy of outside cars and carts waiting for us. We were received with every mark of respect by the wild-looking drivers—men and boys ranging in ages from seventy to fourteen, and dressed in grey and brown homespuns.

Mary and I, with Dash, set off at once on one outside car, leaving Charles to follow on the other

after he had superintended the packing of our kit on the carts, and if our progress was slow we did not notice it in enjoying the scenery.

After leaving the station the road turned north, following the shores of a long narrow lake dotted with small wooded islands, from the shores of which the mountains rose straight up on both sides, the road in places being simply a ledge on the mountain-side.

It was now one of those perfectly clear West of Ireland afternoons, when there does not appear to be a vestige of moisture in the air; and in the wonderful light one could see and even count every rock to the very tops of the mountains, and make out with ease the difference between a mountain sheep and a wild goat quite fifteen hundred feet above us.

We must have driven miles without meeting a human being. Twice the car disturbed small packs of grouse, busy dusting themselves on the sandy surface of the road, and once an otter and cubs crossed the road only a few yards ahead of us. Several times we saw hovering kestrels intent on finding their supper, but no small birds except a few bog larks.

We must have driven about fifteen miles, the road rising gradually all the time, before we reached the gate lodge of "Rackrent Hall," and after the gates had been opened by a small bare-footed gossoon, we told the driver to walk his horse down the avenue, so that we could take in the scenery.

The avenue appeared to lead straight down into

a long narrow arm of the sea, which looked as though it had been brought from Norway and fitted into the West Coast of Ireland—a perfect fiord about seven miles in length and with an average width of half a mile, with sheer mountains on each side for its full length, and at the narrow mouth a glimpse of the open Atlantic, now lit up by the fast sinking sun on the western horizon. At first the mountain land ran up to the sides of the avenue, while in the near foreground there were woods, some of fir and larch, but chiefly of oak and hazel, and here and there groups of birch and Scotch fir, and large patches of gorse, a blaze of yellow, in the open spaces between the woods.

After about half a mile we came to the grounds : great patches of holly bushes and rhododendrons, and small green fields surrounded by hedges of fuchsias, but still no sign of the house.

At last we came to a point where the avenue became as steep as the side of a mountain, and below us lay the house, or rather, at first sight, it looked like a collection of houses joined together.

And the view here was quite the finest I have ever seen. The house stood about two hundred feet above the level of the sea, and beyond it the land fell away sheer to the water ; and so clear was the air that it looked as though you could throw a stone with ease from the hall-door into the sea—in reality a distance of nearly a quarter of a mile.

At the back of the house, about half a mile away, ran a long narrow ridge covered with stunted oak-trees at the top and beech-trees at the foot, which

sheltered the house completely from the westerly gales. In every other direction, as far as you could see, mountains and yet more mountains, and the sea at your feet.

When we entered the hall the place seemed to be packed with servants of all ages and sizes, waiting to welcome us eagerly. A small squat man bade us a thousand welcomes, and told me he was Patsey the butler—asked if we would like a fresh spring fish for dinner, and, without waiting for an answer, bade us follow him.

Patsey led us down by a winding path towards the sea to a tiny gravel bay, where we found a group of wild-looking men just hauling in a salmon-net. They caught about a dozen grand silvery spring fish that haul, out of which Patsey picked a perfect fish of about ten pounds with sea-lice still on, tied the fish up head and tail with a piece of twine, and conducted us back to the house and dinner.

At dinner-time we made the acquaintance of Patsey's assistants—Porseen, the first footman, and Maria, the second footman. Porseen was quite the queerest-looking man I have ever seen, or probably ever will see: a small man and very thin, painfully thin, whose chief features at first sight appeared to be a sloping forehead, a huge pointed nose, no chin, a great Adam's apple set in a long thin neck, no body, ending in a pair of enormous flat feet. Dressed in an old livery swallow-tail coat, the tails of which were not far from the ground, and a pair of grey tweed trousers ending in fully half a dozen wrinkles over his shoes, he presented

a truly wonderful sight, and as regards waiting at table was quite useless.

Maria, a girl as her name implies, was the reverse of Porgeen in every respect except the feet. Her wild shock of flaming red hair, capless, contrasted strangely with Porgeen's wisp of scanty grey locks, and she could have given the old man sufficient flesh to make his figure appear human and not have missed it. But Maria made an excellent footman, obeying Patsey's orders at a double, while Porgeen reminded one of a family jester of old.

Opposite to where Mary sat was a magnificent old mahogany sideboard, with the bottom corner of one of the cupboard doors eaten away. Soon after dinner had started Mary asked Patsey what had happened to this door. "Rats, miss," answered Patsey. "Sure the place bes alive wid them." Towards the end of dinner Dash, who was lying in front of the fire, made a wild rush for a great bookcase which lined one wall of the room, upsetting Porgeen carrying a pile of plates on his way, and started to bark furiously at something behind the bookcase.

Mary lost no time in standing on her chair, and the sudden and terrific yells of Patsey to his underlings made her gather her skirts tightly round her legs.

Apparently a rat-hunt in the dining-room was an everyday occurrence from the promptitude with which Maria stopped up a large rat-hole under one of the windows, and, swiftly seizing the poker, took up a waiting position at the opposite end of the

bookcase to Dash. Porgeen merely rushed aimlessly about the room.

Patsey then, seeing that all was ready, tiptoed over to Dash's end, took hold of the protruding butt of a Castle Connell salmon-rod, and started to rattle it behind the bookcase for all he was worth.

The rat had his choice between Maria and Dash, and foolishly chanced the former, to be laid out flat by a well-directed blow of the poker; but a second rat swiftly followed—startled by an unearthly scream from the frenzied Patsey—to be badly missed by Maria, and, Dash joining in, a wild hunt round and round the room started.

Maria, who up to now had kept her head splendidly, unfortunately got excited—Patsey never ceased yelling directions at her—and, aiming a savage blow at the rat, missed it only to take the following Dash, who was in full chase, fair on the nose. The dog had probably never received a hard blow before in his lifetime, and his frightened and surprised yowls, joined with Patsey's curses at Maria, filled the room. Mary, quickly forgetting her fear of rats in her anger with Maria, jumped off her chair and joined in the chorus, while Charles and I slipped out of the room.

Charles said the noise had given him indigestion, and retired to bed cursing all dogs and rats.

II

I AWOKE the following morning early to the cries of sea-birds, curlew and sandpipers chiefly, returning from feeding on the shores of the ocean during the night-time ; and every time a flock of these birds would pass over or near the house, the starlings sitting on the eve-runs, busy with their morning toilet in the spring sunshine, would stop gossiping and nearly burst their throats, imitating the cries of the curlew and sandpipers to perfection. So well could they imitate the call of a curlew, that on several occasions they actually drew small flocks of this wary but very inquisitive bird from a considerable distance to pass over or round the house, seeking in vain for the author of the cries ; but by this time the starlings would be hard at their toilet again, chuckling with delight at having made fools of the curlew.

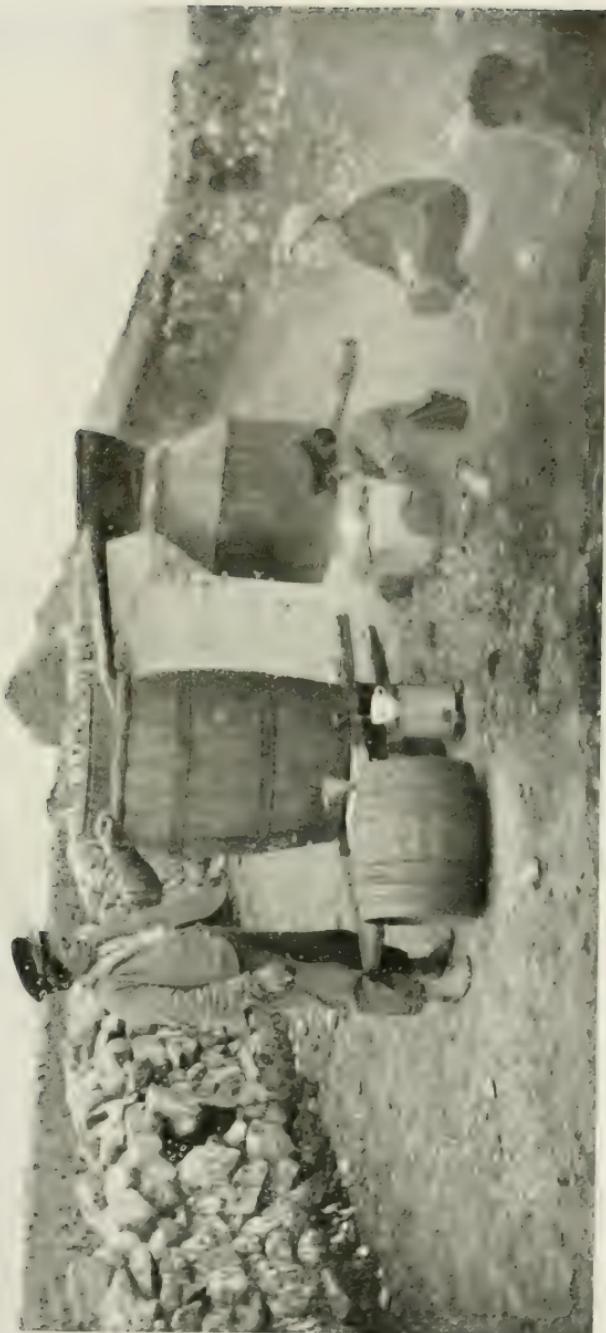
In every direction across the sunlit bay herons and cormorants were hurrying off in search of food, the herons being in a hurry because their young ones, in some scattered nests perilously near the tops of some larch-trees near the house, were making a noise resembling the grinding of pebbles —a reminder to their parents that their breakfast-hour had come.

Lying in bed, I could see through the open window the whole panorama of mountains and sea, even the glint of the morning sun on the breakers of the open Atlantic, and over all the wonderful faint pearly haze of an early spring morning. In the near foreground a family of young rabbits were playing hide-and-seek in a large rhododendron bush, and from every tree and bush in the place a blackbird or thrush was doing his best to thank God for a perfect spring day. Patsey at last broke the spell calling me, and his voice even scared the rabbits.

Patsey and Maria waited on us at breakfast, discoursing freely to us on the merits and demerits of the various dishes in a perfectly natural and frank manner ; in fact, they never stopped talking during the meal, but were never in the slightest degree familiar, and always amusing.

But not a sign did we see of the wonderful and weird Porgeen. After breakfast I asked Patsey what had become of him, to be told that Master Charles had given orders that he should not attend at breakfast ; and Charles told me afterwards that he was not sufficiently recovered from the shock of the man's appearance at breakfast.

We then set out on a tour of inspection under the guidance of Patsey, who seemed to have a complete and intimate knowledge of the place and its owners. The house had obviously been added to several times, and was, in fact, a collection of houses joined together : apparently every generation had added on a room or rooms for his or her special hobby.



A Still in Full Blast

[To face p. 61.]

One wing had been built right away from the main part of the house by an unfortunate owner who, as Patsey put it, “ found himself landed with a long weak family,” in order that he might have some peace and ease. Another part had been built by a lady owner to hold her pet dogs, while the smoking-room had been built a special size with an enormous recess, to take the twenty-two foot Castle Connell rods, which its owner affected, along pegs on the wall.

There seemed to be no architecture or rhyme or reason in the house at all ; merely a medley of rooms of all sizes and shapes.

After this Charles insisted that we really must find out how many servants there were in the place ; adding that he had been round part of the house alone before breakfast, but had got lost, and that in every room he looked into there was either a maid or a cat—in some of them both.

Mary retorted that the servants had nothing whatever to do with Charles, and that she would stand no interference from anyone ; but Charles was firm, and, to keep the peace, I called Patsey into the smoking-room.

On the question being put to Patsey, he replied that it was a “ puzzler,” but that he would do his best, and then proceeded to reel off a list of housemaids, kitchen-maids, herds, garden-boys, hen-women, grooms, and odds and ends of people like stillroom maids and turf gossoons, to an accompaniment of groans from Charles, who, when Patsey had finished, remarked that we would be

ruined by the place. Patsey then started off with the characters of the principal servants.

Starting with Porgeen, he told us how, many years ago, when the mistress first started house-keeping, she wanted a boy to help the butler of those days, and in due course Porgeen presented himself for inspection. When asked for his character and references he could produce none, but mentioned casually the name of a certain butler who, he said, would speak a kind word for him.

And when this butler was asked what he knew about Porgeen he gave him the following dubious character. "Is it Porgeen to work, me lady? Sure he'll do as much work as an ass, and by the same token he'll drink as much as would drown that same ass." And with that character Porgeen started his career as a pantry-boy, to be promoted in due course of time to the rank of first footman.

Charles remarked that he hoped Porgeen had outgrown the latter part of his character, to be told by Patsey that "indeed he has not."

Maria, Patsey informed us, he had known since a foot of cloth would make a coateen for her, which we took to mean since she was a baby, and that she was a quiet decent girl, but too fond of dancing by nights.

But when Patsey came to Biddy the cook, Mary called a halt and swiftly turned the conversation. It would appear that some time or other Biddy's character had suffered a "regular blast," according to Patsey—an inquiry by Charles was quickly suppressed by Mary—that she could hide a quart

of spirits, and it would never show on her ; that she was mighty dangerous in any gentleman's place, and would scandalize the family yet.

Even Mary, accustomed to our modest staff of servants at home, was taken aback at Patsey's list of menials ; but, woman-like, quickly pulled herself together, insisted that they were all delightful and necessary for such a place, and that the cook had told her that they ate nothing but potatoes, cabbages and bacon, soda-bread, and fish which "anyone could catch in the say for the asking ! "

Seeing from the look of Mary's set face that further argument was futile, I said nothing ; but Charles, who had been very busy calculating how many tons of bread, potatoes, cabbage and bacon this host would consume in the course of a year, refused to be quieted, and started to wrangle with Mary, insisting that half the servants must be got rid of.

At this point Patsey, muttering that "sure the craytures must live," quickly faded from the room, and I quickly followed suit, leaving Mary and the obstinate Charles to fight it out.

In the hall I found Robert, the head keeper, waiting for his interview. He told me that there would be no spring fish until we had heavy rain, and suggested that, as it was a grand day, we should drive out with him and have a look round. So calling Charles, who was only too thankful to escape, we made our way to the stables, and ordered an outside car to be got ready at once.

During the drive Robert explained to us that

there were two salmon rivers on the estate—that though they both ran into the bay within a few miles of each other, yet the large river, the Duffmore, was only good for spring fish, and the smaller river, the Glenowen, for grilse and sea-trout; and that they had always been the same since he could remember.

It seemed that originally—Robert did not know how long ago, but it must have been many thousands of years—the north side of the bay was the coast-line of Ireland, which ran south-east towards Galway Bay, and that in those days the land on which the house now stood did not exist. The proof of this was that whereas red sandstone was to be found freely on the land to the south, on the north side there was not a sign of it anywhere. When the land to the south of the bay was thrown up out of the sea, the smaller river was formed; and, according to Robert's original theory, this accounted for the salmon in it being smaller than those in the Duffmore river.

Our road ran along the shore of the bay for several miles, when we came to the mouth of the Duffmore river, where there was a waterfall with quite a good salmon-ladder at one side. Here we found a small salmon hatchery, worked by Robert, and of which he spoke with supreme contempt, saying that it was only “providing food for them hungry divils of kelts.” Leaving the car here, we walked up the river for fully four miles with Robert, who pointed out to us the different pools, now very low owing to the continuous fine weather. And

though the pools held some water, the rest of the river was a mere trickle over a gravel bed. Many of the pools had high banks, and it was obvious that they would only fish well with a strong westerly wind.

At one pool we surprised a large otter—water-dog, Robert called him—on a rock with a fine sea-trout in his mouth; and at a sharp bend in the river put up several ravens and grey crows, feeding on the body of a drowned sheep, which had been left high and dry on a gravel bank.

During our walk we hardly passed or saw a human habitation until we were on the point of retracing our steps. Here, in a straggling wood of stunted oak and birch trees, was a low thatched cottage, where Robert told us that a river watcher called Pat Lyden lived.

Lyden met us at his door, surrounded by bare-footed children (the smallest in a dress made of a flour-sack, and bearing the brand of the flour in large blue letters across his little chest), hens, ducks and several dogs, and, with the western peasant's usual courtesy, insisted that we should enter his cottage to rest; but, remembering McKensie's smoky home, Charles firmly declined. Seeing a look of pain and surprise in the man's eyes, I at once entered, and endeavoured to make myself agreeable.

While in the river watcher's house I several times heard the loud grunts of pigs, but failed to locate them at all, and on the way back asked Robert if he knew where the pigs were. "Indeed and I do well, yer honour," answered Robert with

a laugh. "Sure, Pateen always kapes his pigs under his bed." Charles shuddered, thankful that he had stayed outside, and remarked that it was an unusual place. "In troth yer right, Master Charles," replied Robert; "but sure that same man has a fortune made out of them same pigs, and all through kaping them 'neath the bed."

For some time Charles did not speak: doubtless he was trying to find the connection between a fortune and a pig under the bed. At last his curiosity got the better of his dignity, and he asked Robert how a man could amass a fortune in such a way.

"Begorra," laughed Robert, "many a man has asked that same question of Pateen and got no satisfactory answer, but sure I'll tell yer honour. It's easy enough to sell a pig, but bad enough to know the right time to sell that same pig, and that's where the bed comes in."

Again Charles walked on, thinking hard, but still the connection between the fortune and the pigs under Lyden's bed escaped him, and reluctantly at last he had to ask Robert to throw more light on the subject.

"Sure, yer honour's letting on to be mighty simple" (I could see Charles squirm out of the corner of my eye) "to-day," said Robert. "Pateen has the bed set so that when his pigs is big enough to make bacon of, it's how they'll be after rising the bed on him scratching their backs—so they would, the craytures—and when he can't sleep quiet and aisy like, he knows it's time the pigs be gone."

And Charles laughed for the first time since we came to Ireland.

On our way back to the car we disturbed several herons—cranes, Robert called them—carefully stalking eels and small brown trout in the shrunken pools. Dippers we saw wherever there were rocks standing out of the river, and at one bend two gorgeous kingfishers flashed past us, uttering their sharp little wild screech. So calm and peaceful was the day that it was hard to realize that possibly in the next twenty-four hours—so quickly does the weather change in the West of Ireland—such a storm from the Atlantic might be blowing that it would be nearly impossible to walk against it, and to be out ten minutes in it would mean being wet to the skin.

On the way home Robert suggested that after lunch he should take us out in the bay to set a spillet for flat-fish near the mouth of the Glenowen river, where there was a long sandbank, famous for sole and plaice.

Lunch over, we set out in a fourteen-foot dinghy, and after half-an-hour's row reached our fishing-ground, where we anchored while Robert put the finishing touches to the spillet.

The spillet, which was coiled on a wooden tray, looked to us to be simply a tangle of line and hooks, baited with horrible-looking lugworms. However, Robert soon showed us that there was a method in his tangle, and after buoying one end of the line, he proceeded to let out the spillet at a great pace, whilst Charles slowly rowed the boat. I did not

try to count the hooks, but Robert assured me there were seven hundred and fifty of them. After buoying the end, we left the spillet down for two hours, and during that time tried to catch whiting with hand-lines.

At the end of the two hours we lifted the spillet, and though many of the hooks only held starfish and small crabs, we got altogether thirty-five plaice and three pairs of black sole. Spillet-fishing is a poor form of sport, but has its reward at meal-times.

After tea we went over the stables and farm-buildings, and made the acquaintance of the numerous grooms and herds. On our way to the garden we suddenly heard the father and mother of rows arise—men shouting and screaming, dogs barking, and above all rose an agonized wail from Mary of “Don’t dare to touch him!” The garden had a high wall all round; the first two doors we came to were locked. However, we managed to get in at the third, and found Mary clinging to Dash, surrounded by a crowd of excited garden-boys, whom John, the head gardener, was endeavouring to pacify. Our appearance was the signal for a fresh outburst, everyone trying his hardest to tell us at the top of his voice what had happened, with the result that we could make out nothing except something about a dog.

At last they could shout no longer, and Mary managed to explain to us how one of the stupid boys must have trodden on poor Dash, and, of course, the dog bit him in self-defence. A boy then showed us a tear in his trousers and a slight mark on his leg. Mary took up her story again,

and said that she had offered to compensate the boy with money, which the horrid brute had indignantly refused, demanding poor Dash's liver.

By now the boy had regained his wind, and on my turning to him for an explanation, told us how his eldest brother had been bitten last year by one of "them wild mountainy dogs," and of how the bite refused to heal. First the doctor was called in, and failed; then a wise woman, who gave them a "grand charm," but who charged more than the doctor did, and also failed; and lastly, of how they had gone on a night with a full moon and no frost to the village where the mountainy dog resided, decoyed him away with a rabbit, dispatched him, and finally removed the unfortunate animal's liver, which was afterwards put on the bite, which healed completely within a few days. And the garden-boy was full sure that his bite would never get well until he became possessed of Dash's liver.

At this point Mary again called the boy a horrid brute, and started to make her way towards the house, holding Dash firmly by the collar. Once more the awful racket started, every garden-boy, half-mad with excitement, calling loudly for the sacrifice of Dash. Luckily Patsey appeared at this stage, and in a few minutes pacified the boy with a lock of Dash's hair to place on the bite (Patsey said it was far more efficacious than any liver) and some money. But ever afterwards, during our stay at "Rackrent Hall," Mary took good care that Dash never put his nose inside the garden again.

III

FOR some days after our arrival at “Rackrent Hall” the weather was glorious, with the result that salmon-fishing was out of the question ; in fact, so low did the Duffmore river become that it would have been impossible for any fish to run up it. In many parts of the river between the pools there could not have been more than two or three inches of water at most.

However, to keep us amused, Robert insisted that we should go out to sea in the motor-boat to trawl for flat-fish and to set lobster-pots. In spite of our protestations that he would be sea-sick, Mary insisted on bringing Dash, being in dread that if she left him behind the evil garden-boy would attempt the threatened operation on the dog, in spite of Patsey’s assurance that he would mind him safely.

The mouth of the bay lay about five miles from the house pier, and for the whole distance the bay was the same breadth, about half-a-mile ; so steep were the sides of the bay that it would only have been possible to land at about three places. At one point we passed a narrow valley at right angles to the bay, down which ran a small mountain stream through woods of oak and hazel—a great

place, Robert told us, for woodcock in the winter-time.

The launch was fast, and Mary, who was not very fond of the sea, asked Robert if there was any danger from submerged rocks, to be told by Robert that he had known every rock in the bay since he could walk, and that she need have no fear at all.

Charles, who had not spoken since we left the pier, astounded us by telling Robert the story of the Irish pilot who told the crew of a vessel he was in charge of that he knew every rock on the coast for miles. "And there's one of them," he said, as the vessel struck a rock.

For some time Robert said nothing, but gazed out to sea with a face like a graven image. After fully five minutes, he turned to Charles and said: "Well now, Mr. Charles, that story's tremendous auld." And Charles never tried to palm off any of his chestnuts on Robert again.

Suddenly, without any warning, the bay ended in the open sea, or rather in another broad bay, dotted with small rocky islands, on some of which we could see mountain sheep half buried in the thick heather—left there, Robert told us, by the people from the mainland for months at a time.

Round one island we suddenly ran into a large flock of cormorants. There must have been three or four hundred of them, and almost touching each other. Not having time to rise, they dived as one bird, as though at a word of command, to appear

again, minutes afterwards, scattered over a large expanse of sea.

After standing out to sea clear of the islands, we turned northward until we came to a sandy bay at the very foot of a mountain—the line of demarcation of sand and rock was most distinct and curious. Here Robert proceeded to let down the trawl, and to take a drag across the bay.

The sea was calm, but, as usual in the Atlantic, there was a distinct roll, which, combined with the sun and absence of wind, soon had the expected effect on Dash, and Mary insisted that she must at once be landed with the dog; and on Robert telling her that if she landed there she would have to cross a range of mountains and then swim the bay, or else walk about twenty miles round it before she could reach home, she insisted that we must take up the trawl and go home. However, by the time the argument was finished, Dash was able to sit up and take nourishment, and in the end we were allowed to carry on.

On our way back we stood farther out to sea, passing under the lee of a large island, which Robert told us was inhabited by a dozen families, all of whom were descended from two men who had originally settled on the island and ruined each other by a lawsuit. In fact, it was a famous case in the West, and was often referred to by parish priests as a warning, when endeavouring to restrain their parishioners from having the law on each other over some trivial dispute.

According to Robert, these two men left the

mainland over a hundred years ago, and settled on the island with a handful of sheep, and in time built up a flock of a hundred and one.

As long as they remained single all went well, but a trip to the mainland one Christmas-time resulted in both returning with a wife, and then the trouble started. "Trust the women to see to that, saving yer presence, miss," remarked Robert, turning to Mary.

It was now decided to divide the flock, fifty sheep to each proprietor, but the hundred and first sheep—that was the problem. Neither would give way, and a long and angry dispute followed, the sheep remaining the common property of both.

Even then all might have been well but for one of the women, who, though the shearing season was long past, wanted some wool to make a pair of stockings, and insisted on her husband shearing his half of the unfortunate hundred and first sheep.

Some days afterwards the sheep was found dead in a ditch. One owner ascribed the accident to the cold feelings of the animal having urged him to seek shelter in the fatal ditch, while the other contended that the wool remaining upon one side had caused the sheep to lose its balance, and so to find its grave in the ditch. The inevitable lawsuit followed, and in the end the hundred sheep had to be sold to pay the lawyers, and both men were reduced to a state of utter beggary.

On our way home we set lobster-pots in the passages between the small rock islands at the

mouth of the bay, and got back in time for tea with a fine catch of sole and plaice.

At last the glass began to fall rapidly ; then the storm burst, and for two days and nights the rain fell in a solid sheet. During this time you could not see more than a few yards from the house for the thick mist of rain.

On the third day we came down to breakfast to find the sun shining again, and to see the great waves of mist rolling away off the mountains, leaving their slopes and spurs exactly as though they had been washed clean of all ugly colours, while the tiny mountain streams had become foaming torrents.

We found Robert waiting for us in the hall with the good news that the Duffmore river was in great flood, too high to fish for some hours yet, but that it ought to have run down to fishing-level by lunch-time ; and further, that the river-watchers had reported a great run of spring fish.

After breakfast Charles and I drove off with Robert to wait at the riverside until we could start fishing. When near the river we were joined by an understudy of Robert's, Jack O'Mara. We then drove up the river valley to a point where the river and road ran parallel for some distance, and waited there. When we arrived the river was well over its banks—a mad brown torrent, carrying branches of trees, leaves, and even a dead mountain sheep, at a great rate towards the bay.

We had lunch early, and even while we watched the river grew quieter, and gradually shrank

within its usual banks, while the colour cleared rapidly.

Charles, who was to fish the upper pools with Jack O'Mara while I fished down towards the bay, insisted on starting now at the pool where we were, and Robert and I lit our pipes and watched him.

If Porgeen was an unusual-looking individual, Jack O'Mara was his match, though not in shape. Jack could not have been more than five feet two inches in height, but had the greatest pair of shoulders and arms I have ever seen on any man ; and so large was his body in proportion to the rest of him that he appeared to have five feet of body and two inches of legs ; but, of course, that is an exaggeration—in fact, he resembled a gorilla, and Charles often used to say afterwards that Jack had two rows of teeth—he swore he could see them when the man laughed.

When I first saw Jack he had on an old green cardigan waistcoat, sizes too small for him, and a pair of old Harris knickerbockers, with boxcloth continuations, which had once belonged to the master ; and as the master was six feet three and Jack five feet two, the continuations just buttoned nicely over the tops of his boots like a pair of leggings would, giving the weird impression of a pair of feet at the end of two thighs ; and for headgear he sported an ancient, greeny-black wide-awake hat, which had long ago covered his reverence.

Charles, in his well-fitting clothes, presented a strange contrast to Jack, standing a few yards

away from him, armed with an enormous landing-net in one hand and a gaff in the other—his badges of rank. For some time I idly watched Charles getting out line, expecting every cast to see him stick in a spring fish in the now perfect-looking fishing water, when I was startled by Robert saying in a low voice: “The next cast and he’s in her.” Of course I thought Robert meant a spring fish by “her,” but on looking at him I saw that his eyes were directed, not at the pool, but behind Charles, at a small black mountain cow, standing peacefully chewing the cud.

Charles’s next cast was so near the cow that Robert gasped. It missed, and we waited intently for his next, to be again disappointed. The following cast, however, Charles let the top of his rod back just a little farther, the line refused to come forward, the reel started to scream, and Robert, jumping up, excitedly yelled out: “Sure yer stuck fast in Mrs. Hughes’s auld cow.” And sure enough Charles’s fly was stuck fast in the tail of the cow.

Now a 3/0 salmon-fly driven well home over the barb by a powerful sixteen-foot split-cane rod can be exceedingly painful. Anyway, the old cow seemed to think so, and started to take the country out of face.

Charles, who was not fond of spending money on fishing-tackle, and hated more than anything else to lose a good fly, gave chase as best he could, followed by Jack at a swift amble, with the landing-net and gaff. And a great sight they made.

First, the auld cow, bellowing with pain and rage, and carrying her tail high over her back ; then Charles, with an agonized expression, keeping the point of the rod well up, and falling every ten yards ; and lastly Jack, cantering along in his old pantaloons, and waving the net and gaff over his head.

The cow made a bee-line for home, a cottage about a quarter of a mile from the river, but, being in too great a hurry, got badly bogged half-way in an old drain, and then started to roar in earnest. Charles now carefully reeled up his line with a view to catching the cow's tail and extricating his fly, but was frustrated by the violent efforts of Jack to gaff the unfortunate animal by the tail and the determined way in which the cow insisted in carrying it high over her back and well out of reach of hand or gaff.

At this point old Mrs. Hughes, the owner, appeared on the scene, and, naturally thinking that Charles and Jack were trying to kill her precious cow, started to curse and abuse the two at the top of her voice. As Jack put it afterwards : " Such abuse as she gave Master Charles hasn't been heard in the barony for many a long year."

Charles did his best to find out from Jack what the woman wanted ; but all Jack would mutter was : " The Lord save us, and she to be so small and to have so long a tongue on her." In the end the fly was retrieved, but it cost Charles more to stop Mrs. Hughes's " long tongue " than the price of the fly by a long way.

As soon as Charles regained his wind and dignity he started to fish again, this time taking a careful look behind him each cast to see that there was no obstruction. Robert and I sat down again to watch, and to recover from the exhaustion of violent laughing. Even Jack wanted a rest.

Charles started to fish carefully from the top of the pool, where the water was obviously too strong to hold fish yet ; but about a quarter of the way down the pool there was a boil on the smooth surface of the black-looking water, most likely caused by a large rock, and a certain-looking spot for a spring fish.

Gradually Charles's fly approached this spot, and I could see the sudden double tug a spring fish often gives before the strike, a pause of a fraction of a second, the screech of the reel while the line cut diagonally across the pool with a wicked hiss ; and then twenty pounds of silver and opal flung itself fully three feet clean out of the water, to hit the surface with a loud smack and disappear into the depths of the pool. The fish now became quieter—the mighty leap had winded him—and Charles settled down to kill him in good style.

Again the fish went mad, heading at full speed for the sea, and when we guessed it must have reached the end of the pool, to our utter astonishment it gave another mighty leap, fully thirty yards above where Charles was standing.

At this point Robert nudged me, saying in a hoarse whisper : “Look at himself.” For a second I could see nothing ; then some whitish object

moving fast through the heather about forty yards behind Charles caught my eye, to emerge in the open a mountainy ram with lowered head, charging full tilt at Charles.

A runaway cow is one thing, but a charging ram with horns as big as himself quite another. As I yelled out a warning to Charles, up jumped Jack, and, using the handle of his net as a pike, charged straight at the onrushing ram ; and so powerful was Jack that he actually stopped the animal, but, being unable to hold him, was gradually driven back yard by yard towards the edge of the river.

So intent was Charles with his fish that he was quite oblivious of the desperate struggle going on at his back, and only missed joining his fish by inches when the furious ram drove Jack head over heels into the pool below. Having settled Jack, the ram now turned his attention to Charles, who for some minutes managed to skilfully play his fish and dodge the ram, and yet find time to yell for help.

In the meantime Robert had gaffed Jack by a pantaloone and dragged him ashore, and the two at once gave chase after the ram. Quickly and skilfully Jack succeeded in entangling him in the large net, when Robert soon put him out of action by tying his legs together with a piece of rope. Hardly was this over when loud shouts were heard from Charles. We found him at the tail of the pool, with his fish dead-beat on the surface in a backwater, and Robert quickly slipped the net under it, to lay a beautifully-made, fresh-run

twenty-pounder on the bank. Leaving Charles and Jack, we now made our way down the river to our first pool

The day was by now perfect. So wonderful was the scenery that one's mind continually wandered from the fishing to the beauty of the surrounding mountains, with their wonderful shades of yellow, green, orange and purple, all perfectly blended, and yet changed from minute to minute with the passing of fleecy clouds across the blue sky.

The first pool we came to was a deep, natural basin, formed by a sudden turn of the river, where the banks on either side, nearly perpendicular, rose to a considerable height, and to the water's edge were thickly covered with hollies and high heather. At the top of the pool a great rock, crowned with yellow gorse, forced the river into a narrow channel for a space of several yards, to form a deep, black-looking pool below ; while the winter flood had scoured out the river-bed on one side at the tail to a depth of fully ten feet, and piled up a long gravel bed on the opposite side.

Before I started to fish Robert showed me his own collection of flies, tied by himself, and assured me that he would kill three fish with them to every fish I would kill with my own—Jock Scots, Lea Blues and Grey Monkeys chiefly. He pointed out that my flies, which I had used successfully in Scotland and the South of Ireland, were suitable for rivers where there were no surrounding mountains and the water was not stained brown from always running through boggy land—turf-stain, he

called it—but that his flies, all of which had plain mallard wings, gold tinsel, rough, greeny-brown mohair bodies and golden olive or claret hackles, blended with the subdued light and turf-stained water.

To please Robert I put up a Jock Scot at the tail and one of his flies as a dropper, and at the end of the day's fishing had verified his prophecy, killing only one fish on the Jock and four on Robert's flies.

Charles's first fish was easily the biggest we got that day. He killed three and I got five, and the lot, including the twenty-pounder, averaged thirteen and a half pounds—all fresh-run fish, and most of them with sea-lice on. I also killed two sea-trout at the lowest pool, of three and three and a half pounds' weight.

Charles had a great story when we met in the evening of losing a whale in the same pool that he killed the twenty-pounder, and appealed to Jack for confirmation, who, with the western peasant's love of trying to please people, assured us that the fish was surely as big as the mountainy ram, and must have weighed at least four pounds. Charles, thinking that Jack was trying to make a fool of him, was furious when I started to laugh, and turned on the unfortunate Jack ; but Robert saved the situation by quickly telling us that Jack meant no harm—that he was simple, and, like a crow, could only count up to four, so four pounds was his way of saying that it was the biggest fish he had ever seen.

The eight spring fish made a great show lying in a row in the heather, the lovely shades of opal and pink still on their sides, and we made our way to the waiting car proud, if very tired, fishermen.

At dinner-time there was no sign of Porgeen, and on Charles remarking on his absence, Patsey told us, with a private wink at me, that the poor creature had taken a small pain, and was after going to bed for a while.

Mary at once wanted to send for a doctor, but Patsey assured her that the old man often took a small pain, but that there would be nothing on him in the morning. And, true for Patsey, old Porgeen took many a small pain during our stay at "Rackrent Hall," and before long the suspicion that the little pain was caused by a big dose of poteen received ample confirmation.

After dinner Mary informed us that she had a surprise for us, but, before she could spring it, Charles lit his candle and made for the door, saying that he was too tired for any more surprises that day, and left me to deal with it.

It appeared that among the many forms of sport to be had at this wonderful place, rat-hunting took a high place, with Patsey as the master rat-hunter; and that the kitchen was his chief scene of operations, which was fitted up to serve as a rat-pit on occasions.

At one time a thoughtful house-carpenter found that he was spending a large part of his time repairing the holes made nightly by the rats in the

various kitchen, scullery and servants' hall doors. To put an end to this monotonous work he hit on the ingenious idea of making little trap-doors over these various holes, lined them with tin and weighted them with lead, and connected all by a clever system of cords and pulleys to one main cord, which led into the hall.

Then, when it was decided to use the kitchen as a rat-pit, all that was required was to carefully test and set these trap-doors, well ground-bait the kitchen floor with the interior economies of rabbits, and all was ready. The maids would receive instructions to retire to bed at an early hour, and at or about midnight the main cord would be released, down would fall the trap-doors with a bang, and all that remained was to kill the rats.

Wet weather was usually the best time for this performance, the rats then making for the shelter and warmth of the house; and after the heavy rain of the last few days Patsey had insisted on a rat-hunt being held without delay. Dash was to be the chief performer, according to Mary's idea, assisted by two terriers which Patsey had brought down from his cottage.

Soon after midnight Patsey came to the smoking-room to wake me up, and to say that all was ready. He then armed each of us with a lamp and a stick, and we made our way to the kitchen with the dogs, and quickly closed the door.

The kitchen was a large room, but when we got inside there literally did not seem to be a square

inch of the floor which was not covered with rats. The whole place looked to be seething with them, and at first the dogs could only stand stock-still and yell, bothered to know which rat to take first. And at the sight of the struggling, squirming and squeaking rats, bolting in every direction in search of cover, Mary started to scream, and made frantic efforts to open the door and escape; on being frustrated by Patsey she jumped on the kitchen table and stayed there until we had finished.

But in less than a minute from the time of our entry there was not a rat to be seen anywhere, and the kitchen was again as silent as the grave—the whole scene was like a very bad nightmare.

Patsey now produced two fine old Court swords, and, giving me one, bade me use it at one end behind a large old dresser which stood near the great fireplace, while he prodded at the other end with his sword. At the first prod the rats started to bubble out in an endless stream, and the terriers got to work in great style, while Dash, who was quite useless as a ratter, made it his business to break every bone in the rats' bodies after the terriers had done their dirty work, at the same time keeping up a maddening barking.

Every piece of heavy furniture which gave any cover yielded the same steady flow of rats—young, middle-aged and old rats, brown rats, yellow rats and grey rats. Even the plate-rack in the scullery—full of plates—was stiff with the brutes squashed in between the plates, and as still as the plates themselves—hoping to escape by silence.

Here the swords were most useful, picking the rats out from between the plates, without breaking a single plate, like picking winkles out of their shells with a hair-pin.

Even dish-covers and the like, hung on nails in the walls, when lifted off were found to hold rats. And when I thought all was over, the wily Patsey produced yet more rats from the inside of roller-towels on the doors, flour-bins, potato-boxes, and out of a pair of the cook's boots on a chair.

By the time we had finished the kitchen and scullery all the terriers could do was to hurl themselves flat on the floor, with their tongues hanging out to the roots, and their breath coming in short, dry gasps ; and, indeed, Patsey and I were not in much better plight, while Dash was as fresh as paint and barking for more.

As soon as we had recovered we made a move for the servants' hall, only to find that one of the trap-doors there leading outside had stuck, with the inevitable result that the rat-hunt was over for that night—and I was not sorry.

After a whisky-and-soda with Patsey I crawled up to bed, to dream that I was trying to net a mountainy ram in a plate-rack, and of a vain attempt to gaff Charles's whale with a Court sword.

IV

FOR some days after the famous rat-hunt we had great spring fishing, with never a blank day, and Charles escaped the attentions of the native live stock. And after the great deluge of rain the weather was perfect—soft, westerly winds, with a real feeling of spring in them, and not too much sunshine to spoil the fishing. But gradually the river fell, and day by day we met less fish, until at last Robert advised us to put up our rods and wait for the next flood.

Mary was by now deeply interested in the gardens—the evil garden-boy had been banished to his mountain home—and Charles and I found time begin to hang a little heavily on our hands.

The westerly winds brought a certain amount of sea in from the Atlantic, and made trawling in the motor-boat out of the question for the present; and for some unknown reason our Ford had not arrived from Dublin.

Porgeen, at work or at play, drunk or sober, was a never-ceasing source of wonder and amusement to us, but more wonderful still were the stories Patsey used to tell us of the old ruffian's career.

Porgeen was an old man when we came to “Rackrent Hall,” and though I never saw him work

as hard as an ass is supposed to work, yet in our time alone he must have consumed enough drink to drown several. All came alike to him—whisky, stout or poteen. And though he might have partaken of all three overnight, the drink never knocked a feather out of him, and he would come up smiling the next morning at breakfast. I never saw him eat, but the cook used to tell Mary : “Sure, ye could not get the potatoes on to his plate fast enough.”

For many years the mistress kept a herd of shorthorns, and at one time had a very dangerous bull, called Don Juan, which was continually breaking out of his box and frightening the wits out of every one in the place. So wicked and dangerous did the bull become at last, that the master swore he would surely shoot him the very next time he broke out of his box.

There came a day, when the mistress was above in Dublin and the master away at a shooting-party, the bull broke out of his box and went tearing mad through the place. James, the herd, tried every device he could think of to coax the brute back into his box, but all in vain, not one yard would he go ; and any moment the master might drive into the yard. Then he would surely shoot Don Juan, and when the mistress returned from Dublin she would surely murder James.

Black night came, and still the bull roared and roamed through the place, and James gave it up in despair. At this point Porgeen, who was a notorious coward and terrified of the bull, put his

head out of the pantry window and, in a loud voice like the master's, shouted into the yard : "James."

Poor James, thinking that his worst fears were realized, rushed to the pantry window only to find Porgeen's long nose stuck out over the top.

"Look it here, James," said Porgeen. "Do ye know phat ye'll do ?"

"Phat ?" queried James.

"Sure, my God," shouted Porgeen, "would yerself walk into a dark room at night ? Put a light in the baste's box, and I'll engage he'll walk in quiet and aisy-like, the crayture."

James had a supreme contempt for the likes of Porgeen, but he was desperate by now, and so proceeded to hang a lighted lamp in the bull's box. And, sure enough, as Porgeen had said, within ten minutes the crayture walked in quiet and aisy-like, as though the only thing in the world he had been waiting for was the light.

Now James, far from being thankful to Porgeen for his useful advice, was mad to think that a dirty little leprechaun like Porgeen should be able to teach him anything about bulls ; and, moreover, he knew full well that if he did not turn the tables on the old footman, and that very quickly, for the rest of his days he would never hear the end of Don Juan and the light. He could hear the housemaids and kitchen-maids asking him softly : "And how's the bull to-day, Mr. James ?" and : "Would he like the loan of one of the mistress's nightlights for the bull's box this evening ?"

James lit his pipe and thought his hardest for a time, and then prepared for action.

They had at the time a shorthorn heifer, as Patsey graphically described her to us, "the dead spit of himself," meaning by himself Don Juan. The next evening at dusk, after changing the heifer into Don Juan's box, James, after a lot of trouble, managed to coax Porgeen out of the house, to see how fine and aisy the bull was in his box with a light, and insinuating that it was all due to Porgeen's cleverness. In the meantime one of James's numerous understudies had hidden himself in the box, leaving the door closed but not bolted.

Slowly but surely James manœuvred the old footman round to the bull's box, all the time coaxing and flattering him until he felt as brave as a lion and fit for any bull. At last they reached the box, and when Porgeen leant over the half-door, as he thought, to have a good look at Don Juan, the lad hidden in the box hit the heifer a terrible belt across the quarters with an ash-plant; the heifer let out a great roar, and, half mad with the sudden pain and fright, charged straight for and through the unfastened half-door. James let a screech out of him fit to wake the dead, and yelled: "My God, the bull's out agin," and Porgeen turned to sprint for dear life and the pantry.

James and his understudies (who, of course, shared James's disgrace) had thought out the assault carefully beforehand. They had argued, and rightly, that Porgeen would be sure to take

the nearest way to the pantry, which lay through the big cow-house, down the middle of which ran a long passage. And as the heifer generally lived in this big cow-house, she would be certain to follow close on Porgeen's heels, and even, with great good luck, might catch him up: but he had been a noted runner in his youth, and it would be a very close thing.

Though Porgeen had run some fine races in his time, he ran the race of his life that night, and the chances are he would have reached sanctuary in the pantry well before the heifer could have caught up with him had the cow-house passage been clear; but this was where James's revenge came in.

As Porgeen, knowing every inch of the ground, dashed headlong in the dark into the passage, he tripped over a pig-trough full of swill; his eyes and mouth full of swill, he gathered himself together, only to fall over a sharp-edged bucket full of boiling water; up once more and on, he fell flat on his face from a rope stretched knee-high across the passage. At last the unfortunate man arrived at the pantry, feeling as though every bone in his body was broken, scalded by the boiling water, and his face and clothes a mass of swill, and dashed into the grinning Patsey's arms screaming: "The bull, the bull!"

Patsey told us that for a full month afterwards Porgeen refused to set a foot outside the door, and that nothing short of setting fire to the house would have moved him. And ever afterwards,

when James used to put his head in at the pantry window and invite the old footman to come out and have a look at the bull, Porgeen would grin with rage and answer : " Ah, run away and play now, James ; sure I have the tay-things to wash, and what's more, herself " (the mistress) " would be vexed if I were to go out now."

For many years priests and pledges completely failed to prevent Porgeen from smuggling drink into the house and consuming it at his leisure. It used to be one of Patsey's many queer duties to try and keep Porgeen out of drink, but the old man was always one too many for Patsey. Finding that he could not stop Porgeen getting drink into the house, Patsey directed all his energies to seizing (and most probably consuming himself) the drink in the house, and the two were always engaged in a battle of wits.

For a long time the old grandfather clock in the big hall stood Porgeen in good stead to hide his black bottles in, and completely defeated the butler. But at last suspicion was directed to the clock through Porgeen being repeatedly found gazing intently at it, there being another clock in the pantry ; and also it was common knowledge that he could not read the time. Inside the clock Patsey found a large black bottle, and Porgeen had to try another hiding-place.

Next his fox-like brain hit on the bolster of the bed in his master's dressing-room, knowing full well how an Irish housemaid made a bed, or, rather, didn't make it ; and this hiding-place

lasted him until one unlucky day the cork came out of the bottle, and the master, on going to dress for dinner, found his room reeking of poteen.

On these occasions Porgeen was always given notice, but invariably replied : “ Don’t be onaisy, me lady, sure I’ll never leave ye ”—and he never did.

After we had been at “Rackrent Hall” about a month, Porgeen reached such a state of chronic exhilaration that Charles said something really must be done. Mary suggested that he should be made to take the pledge, Charles said he must go, and on their appealing to me I could think of nothing better than to try and ration the old man’s drink. But, of course, nothing was done, except to tell him to go home, of which he did not take the slightest heed.

The following night at dinner he was worse than ever, his walk round the table resembling that of an indifferent tight-rope walker with a vegetable-dish just clinging to each hand. Twice Charles jumped up, expecting to get the contents of a dish on top of his well-groomed head, but each time the old man saved the situation by a terrific effort of mind over body.

After dinner we consulted Patsey, who told us that when Porgeen got too bad entirely he used to be chastised, and that he would see to that; and, having boundless faith in Patsey’s powers, we left it at this and prayed for the best. Mary wanted to ask Patsey foolish questions, but we managed to persuade her to leave it to him.

The Road to "Rackrent Hall."

(*Tr. 60*, p. 96.)



The following afternoon Charles and I were on our way to Robert's house, and when near the gardens we heard the most terrible cries of an old man in distress in the big walled-in kitchen-garden, and foolishly rushed as hard as we could to the rescue. Of course, we ought to have guessed what the noise was about. Inside the kitchen-garden a horrible sight met our eyes—the chastisement of poor old Porgeen.

In the centre of the garden stood a group: Porgeen, looking very dejected; John, the head gardener, and also Porgeen's brother-in-law—a huge man, as broad both ways as he was long, and looking very truculent; Porgeen's wife—a great, wild-looking, strapping, mountainy woman; and lastly Patsey, with a stout ash-plant.

As we entered Porgeen, roaring and bellowing, at Patsey's direction, was mounting on John's great back pick-a-back fashion (Patsey told us afterwards that Porgeen always reminded him of a fly on a round of beef on these occasions), while his wife, Honor, having received the ash-plant from Patsey, stood ready for action. But before the first blow could fall Porgeen started to cry out: "Arrah, mind me livery buttons. My God, the mistress'll murder me if I lose one," and kept it up all through the severe beating which followed from Honor, while all the time a cloud of dust rose at every blow from the old man's clothes.

At last Patsey shouted: "Enough, enough, woman; do ye want to kill yer husband?" John released his grip of the old man, who at once ambled

off for the pantry, while we stole away before the party knew that we had witnessed the chastisement of Porgeen. A drastic remedy of other days, but it had a wonderful effect on the old footman, who showed no signs of poteen for many days after it.

For years Porgeen had one arch-persecutor, a man called Rogan, who drove the bread-van which used to deliver Mr. Mulligan's fresh bread throughout that part of the country twice a week. Rogan always managed to turn up at the house at dinner-time, and afterwards would spend a pleasant (to him) half-hour or hour in the pantry, gossiping with Patsey and badgering Porgeen. Apparently Porgeen was madly jealous of the bread-van man's attentions to his wife—probably all imagination—and Rogan's parting shot used always to be: “ Ah well, I must be getting along now ; sure Honor ” (Porgeen's wife) “ will be after expecting me this last hour or more.”

At this Porgeen would spring up, livid with rage, and scream at the breadman : “ Get along to blazes out of this, ye dirty robber, or I'll hit ye a bat along the lug-hole.” Then Rogan, who was a huge man with fingers like harrow pins, would grip Porgeen by the first part of him which came handy, deposit him in the sink on top of the “ tay ” things, boiling water and soda, and be out and off before Porgeen, screaming with rage and pain from the boiling water, could extricate himself. And this used to happen regularly twice a week for years.

Mary once asked Patsey why so much poteen did not kill Porgeen. "Is it to kill that man, miss? Sure hasn't he the constitution of an ass, and did anyone ever see a dead ass anyhow?" replied Patsey, and then proceeded to tell us how Porgeen once really did very nearly meet his end from drink.

Both the master and the mistress were above in Dublin at the time, and the steward brought Porgeen a present of a pint of fresh-made poteen from some farm in the mountains where he had been buying sheep, meaning to give the old man a small dose at a time.

But the first taste of the fiery, newly-made poteen set the old man crazy for more, and, knowing where the steward had locked up the bottle, he broke open the press at the first chance and retired to the pantry with the bottle.

Some time afterwards Patsey found him lying on the pantry floor, apparently stone-cold. Of course there was tremendous excitement among the servants and a lot of talk, but nothing done: one and all were afraid that the old fellow's death would be the cause of getting them into serious trouble. The steward then appeared on the scene, which now resembled the beginning of a wake, and, being a northerner, at once took action.

Porgeen was placed on a groom's back and carried to the big sleeping-room over the harness-room where he usually slept, except during the weekends, when he used to visit his family. They then put him to bed with a red-hot brick on every part

of his anatomy, covered him up with a pile of horse-sheets, and left him there to recover or die. The following morning the hardy old lad was down and about as early as usual, and quite unconscious of anything unusual having happened overnight.

During one of the first walks we took we passed Porgeen's home, which had originally been a small outhouse at the gable-end of his wife's parents' house—a small mountain farm, just outside the demesne walls.

Honor was a housemaid below at the big house at the time of her marriage to Porgeen, and as soon as the ceremony was over the question arose as to where Honor was to live. Porgeen's idea was that she should continue to reside with her parents, but unfortunately they held different views, knowing the vagaries of the bridegroom. Eventually Porgeen paid some handyman to fit up this outhouse—it was little better than a hen-house—as a dwelling, and here they had brought up a large family, and appeared perfectly content and happy.

V

WE found life at "Rackrent Hall" very pleasant, but at the same time very different to the life we lead in England ; a life without any rough edges or harsh words, but, best of all, with plenty of elbow-room. Gradually we sank into the background of endless servants and took of its colour. And though the servants never appeared to really get down to any hard work, yet if you asked them to do any mortal thing on earth, even if they never did it, they would acquiesce with a pleasant and willing : "Indeed and I will, yer honour," or, "Sure it's a pleasure to do that same for ye, miss :" very different to the surly growl of an English servant, when you ask him to do something outside his sphere of work, of "It ain't my job," or "I didn't engage myself to do that kind of work."

But, on the other hand, our Irish servants had not the remotest idea of time. Most of them could not even read the face of a clock, and even the invaluable Patsey was as oblivious of time as the casual Porgeen. Further, if an Irish peasant cares for you, he will give you any answer sooner than none, even when he is completely ignorant of the subject in question.

Patsey and Robert were the biggest optimists I have ever met. Ask Patsey, when he called you in the morning, if it was a fine day, he would reply with a laugh : " It is that, sorr, it's a grand day :" and when he drew the curtains you would see the rain coming down like water out of a worn-out sieve and remark that it appeared to be raining, to be told : " Ah, that's only a morning mist, sure the sun'll be shining in the canopy of heaven by the time ye have yer breakfast taken."

And Robert, so different to a taciturn and morosely pessimistic Scotch gillie, never would own that it was a really dud fishing day. Even on a heavy, windless day, with the river far below fishing height, he would encourage one with a : " Sure there's always a fool in the river, and yer honour will surely meet that same one to-day." And when you stuck in a fish he would make you think that it was all through your own cleverness, and if you lost it through your own stupidity he always had a plausible excuse to show that it was the fault of everything and everybody except you.

Even Charles, downright Sassenach of the Sassenachs, grew gradually more genial and readier to make allowances for the weaknesses of others : but though Mary strove laboriously and earnestly to adapt herself to her surroundings, she remained as obviously an Englishwoman as she would have appeared in Paris.

Before long Mary began to seek for some amusement for the servants, though, as far as I could see, they always appeared thoroughly amused with

each other, and probably with us, judging from the screams of delight (chiefly female, certainly) one heard at any time of the day or night in the kitchen and servants' hall.

In the remote country districts of the west of Ireland amusement—in the English sense—appeared to be non-existent. Most of the servants had never seen a cinema, luckily for them, or theatre ; village clubs, recreation rooms, cricket and football clubs are unknown. But one and all were passionately fond of dancing, and would dance anywhere and at any hour, from the dining-room before breakfast to the King's high-road on a fine moonlight night, to the music of any wandering fiddler or a girl with a melodeon—“to-and-fro” they called it.

So it was settled that a dance should be given, the details to be arranged by Mary, with Patsey's help, which meant that Patsey would command and we obey. Charles said that we were weak, but Mary insisted : Patsey was enthusiastic, while I was neutral.

The great hay-barn was swept and garnished ; Patsey made a journey to the little town of Eastport, engaged two notorious fiddlers for the night of the dance, and returned long after dinner-time with a cartload of porter and provisions, singing “The Wearing of the Green” at the top of his voice. Lastly Mary told each servant that they might bring a guest.

For days before the dance none of the servants did a stroke of work, while we seemed to spend

most of our time in the dining-room, the table pushed into a corner, practising the steps of some weird dance called a "square set," with which Patsey insisted that we must open the ball. Patsey was to partner Mary, Charles the cook, and I was to lead out Robert's wife: and for music we had Maria with a full-toned to-and-fro.

The night of the dance came and with it a crowd which filled the hay-barn to overflowing: they must have run a fine comb over that wild country-side to collect so many people, young and middle-aged. And in many a mountain cabin that night there could only have been left behind those who were unable to move from extreme age or youth.

Patsey, resplendent in a boiled shirt, a violent green tie, and what looked suspiciously like a pair of my best pumps, quickly cleared a space in the middle of the barn, and in a firm voice ordered his victims to come in. Gripping Mary by the waist with a great red paw, and at the same time yelling to the band "Up again," he started off full split on the intricate steps of that awful square set, followed meekly by Charles and the cook in a black satin dress, and by Mrs. Robert and myself.

The band, consisting of the two Eastport fiddlers, well primed by Patsey, and Maria, armed with a huge, new, extra-powerful to-and-fro, soon got into their stride and set a tremendous pace. The floor was of uneven cement, and the heat from many oil lamps hung on the walls and the crowd of country people, almost unbearable from the start.

Gradually the audience began to beat time with

their feet to the tune, timidly at first and then so loudly as to raise a cloud of dust.

At one part of the performance we used to waltz our partners round as fast as they could go, and Patsey would give the signal for this with a terrific yell, louder each time, and greeted always with shouts of applause from the delighted audience. Charles found the pace too hot for his liking, but the cook saw to it that he never flagged for an instant. When at last the band stopped from sheer exhaustion or possibly want of drink, we were only able to blindly stagger to some chairs along the wall, which some of the onlookers kindly vacated for us. Once Charles had recovered his wind he disappeared swiftly, to be seen no more that evening.

Directly the band had recovered Porseen appeared, and I could see at once that he was what Patsey would describe as "nicely"; the band struck up "Pop goes the Weasel," and the old villain started to slowly caper about in the middle of the barn with steps like a cat on hot bricks.

I don't believe that he knew a single dance-step, nor had he the slightest idea of time, but he gave a comic show which would have earned him in a month at any London music-hall enough money to keep him in ease and poteen for the rest of his days.

He was always out of time, and would give the band a withering look every few seconds, to explain to us that it was the musicians' fault and not his.

The audience—every chair held a boy with a

girl sitting on his knee, which appeared to be the accepted custom (a pity Charles did not wait to entertain the cook in this fashion)—cheered the old man to the echo, and he carried on until he came to a complete standstill, when Patsey seized and removed him, to be revived with poteen for a further performance.

Jigs, waltzes, polkas and sets followed in quick succession, the only pauses being to hearten up the hardy fiddlers: then, in response to loud cries for a song, Porseen appeared once more, and sang his only song: “The Kerry Recruit.”

By now he was solemn tight, and, if possible, funnier than before. He took quite a minute to remember each line, in spite of Patsey’s hoarse promptings, and when not singing took funny little mincing steps across the floor, pretending to be dancing with a napkin, which he carried twisted across his right arm, and holding one end with his left hand as though clasping his partner’s hand.

Gradually Porseen grew quieter and quieter, and his capers became slower and slower, until at last he could hardly raise a foot from the floor. And just as we expected to see him collapse, Patsey and Maria rushed at him, gripped him by the head and feet, and amidst the delighted shouts of the rest carried him off to bed. And Mary and I seized the opportunity to slip away unobserved, leaving the company to enjoy themselves unrestrained by our presence. Patsey told us the next morning that they carried on until nearly breakfast time, when the two fiddlers tucked their

fiddles under their arms and set out to walk back to Eastport, a matter of sixteen Irish miles, and that he had to hunt the guests out of the place with a stick.

Our Ford turned up the day after the dance, and looking none the better for the journey. The driver's excuse for the delay was that he had been afraid to drive a new car fast: Robert told us afterwards that the man told him he had spent several days fishing on the way, and had had good sport too. Mary wanted to keep the man on as a chauffeur, but Charles declared that if another servant was brought into the place he would leave the next day for England, and would wash his hands of us, and, moreover, that the brute would probably spend the greater part of his time poaching. In the end he was returned to Dublin, and Charles undertook to drive and care for our Tin Lizzie.

Spring fishing being temporarily at a standstill owing to the weather, we determined to take a drive through the country to the south and see a hotel on the coast, of which Mary had read great accounts in the Irish papers.

Lizzie went well and we had an interesting drive through a country of mountains, lakes, rivers and bogs. The roads were narrow, but with a good sandy surface. Charles took us along at a good rate. And as he gained confidence the pace increased, until a high and narrow culvert over a small mountain stream nearly broke his nerve altogether.

At the time we were admiring a chain of lakes in a valley with high rocky mountains on each side : Charles driving, and Mary and I sitting behind, with the everlasting Dash between us. Suddenly, without any warning, Dash shot clean into the air, followed by Mary—Lizzie was clean off the road and flying at the time—Mary made a wild clutch at Dash and I at Mary, and as the car came to earth again we all lit on top of Charles, who was both frightened and infuriated. However, in future he took his culverts at proper speed.

When about four miles from the coast the road ran along the shore of a lake in a valley with high mountains rising up at each side, and at a sudden turn in the road we came upon a magnificent castle of whitish stone built into the side of the mountain : above and on both sides of it great woods ran right up the face of the mountain until they met the bare rock near the top. In front lay a lake, surrounded by grounds full of fine shrubs, and all along the road fuchsia hedges.

After leaving this valley the road ran through open, rocky country towards a mountain standing alone ; and on a promontory to the north of this we found the hotel, a quaint old house, standing almost on the very shore, with its sides slated to keep out the spray of the Atlantic gales in winter-time.

Some former owner had apparently made a half-hearted effort to grow trees, but about fifteen feet seemed to be the limit they had been able to struggle up to, and on this fine spring day the rooks

were busy building in them. The drive passed along this stunted rookery on higher ground, and we could look right down into the nests from the car.

The view from the house was wonderful. Looking across a bay of deepest blue, one could see range after range of mountains: the nearest one shades of vivid green and golden brown in the sunshine, and the distant ones deep purple like the bloom on a grape. And while we watched the lights and shades were ever changing as the clouds passed inland on the soft west wind.

We had tea, served by a quaint old butler, with a face like a harvest moon set in a fringe of fiery orange whiskers, called Martin Moon, and then prepared to start for home. But Lizzie had other notions, and refused to even think of starting. Charles got in and under her, but as the old butler described it: "Devil a puff could he knock out o' her." Luckily we had brought some kit in case of accidents, as in the end we had to stay the night.

It was the queerest hotel I had ever seen: the bedrooms seemed to be everywhere and anywhere, up and down stairs, through each other, and even leading out of the sitting-rooms. The place gave one the idea that the owners had numbered all the rooms, put the numbers in a hat, and then drawn lots whether a room should be a sitting-room, bedroom, or pantry.

We had roast chickens for dinner, extraordinary tough birds. Charles could not face them, and

shuddered when they came on to the table. Afterwards he told me that his bedroom looked out into the kitchen yard, and that, when washing his hands after battling with Lizzie, he had been the unwilling witness to the last chapter in the chickens' lives. How he had been watching them peacefully feeding in the yard when the kitchen door suddenly burst open, and out rushed a wild-looking, bare-footed young woman, with her hair flying behind her, and brandishing a huge carving knife in one hand. How she had hunted the chickens round and round the yard, and finally cornered them, to finish the horrid job in a bath, where she had also plucked them and removed their superfluous parts ; and of how he had told Martin Moon afterwards that he would not require a bath in the morning, and advised me to do likewise. Some of the silver was priceless, but as black as your hat ; and there was beautiful old Sheffield plate with all the plating gone.

Charles and I were smoking before going to bed when Martin opened the door, and peered into every corner of the room, and Charles asked him if he was looking for anything, to receive the extraordinary reply : " In troth I am, yer honour. Sure, Bridget's just after telling me the auld grey cow's missing this day and a night."

" But," laughed Charles, " you don't expect to find her in the smoking-room, do you ? "

" May be and may be not ; sure, there's no telling where that auld divil of a strap would

ramble to," replied Martin, and then departed to carry on the hunt.

Presently we retired for the night, and when I was half undressed there came a knock at my door, which then opened to admit the face and whiskers of Martin Moon.

"She's found," said he, with a grin.

"Where?" said I.

"And where do you think?" said he.

"In the cow-house?" I ventured, to be met with an indignant snort.

"Not at all, but in the best bedroom, beyond the billiard-room, and what's more, that same auld divil's after eating a blanket and the best half of one of the missus's fashionable county-panes, bad cess to her, and good-night to yer honour."

The quick-death chickens must have been too much for me, for I dreamt that Martin Moon and I were riding two auld divils of grey cows, and that Charles wouldn't let me use stirrups, and that every time we jumped a culvert I leapt feet in the air, to wake up with a thud on the floor in the moonlight.

The chickens, or rather the remnants, appeared cold for breakfast, and at the sight of them Charles declared that if Lizzie was still not for it he for one would walk home: but to our joy Lizzie started off first twist, as though she had never sulked in her life, and we fled home from that house of auld grey cows and sudden-death chickens.

By now the spring fishing was practically over

and we hoped that the next flood would bring the grilse up the Glenowen river, but were disappointed. The flood came all right, but the watchers reported that they had not seen a single grilse running. However, Robert was never defeated, and, armed with a tin of worms and a ten-foot trout-rod, he and I set off to fish a mountain stream the morning after the flood.

We had a hard and wet walk round the spur of a mountain before we came to the stream, which ran down a ravine into the valley to join the Glenowen river, and, like all these mountain streams, only fished well after a flood.

Robert produced some enormous hooks on gut fit to kill a spring fish on, and smiled a polite incredulity when I insisted on using the finest Stewart tackle and lightest gut.

Starting in the valley, we fished steadily upwards, catching many beautiful, small, golden-brown trout, about three to a pound. Robert had never seen Stewart tackle worked before, and when I gave him the rod he made a poor fist of it at first, being used to allow the trout to swallow his big hooks before striking. But when I showed him how to cast the worm up-stream, and to give a quick but gentle strike with the wrist directly an obstruction was met with, he was delighted with the, to him, novel method of worming, and in a very short time was as expert as any angler to be met with in Berwickshire—so quick-witted is the Irish peasant.

When the stream grew too small to fish, we sat

down under a big rock to eat our lunch and take in the view.

After a time the conversation turned on eels, and Robert told me how at one time eel-fishers used to come every year from Athlone to fish all the lakes and rivers in the district, and he went on to describe them as terrible cross fellows, but tremendous cute ; and he told me of how they used to send all the eels they caught to Holland, where they were at once shipped back to the London market. It seemed a long way round from the west of Ireland to Billingsgate market, but when Robert explained that Dutch eels fetched twice the price of Irish eels, then the tremendous cuteness of the cross eel-fishers was pretty obvious.

Robert's theory of how eels were "made" was fairly quaint and original. According to him, the process was quite simple : all you had to do was to pull a bunch of hairs from the tail of an old white mare, then put them under stones in a mountain stream on a dark night without and frost. In a short time the hairs would turn into a kind of jelly, Robert assured me, and the next time you peeped under the stones the jelly would have become young eels.

The latest descriptions which scientists had given the world of the wonderful journeys made by eels across miles of land and water to reach the ocean in order to spawn, and of the elvers coming up from the ocean in millions to our lakes and rivers, sounded tame and commonplace beside Robert's theory and practice ; and after this I

was fully prepared to hear startling new natural history ideas, and Robert did not disappoint me.

On our way home we met Charles and Jack O'Mara, driving two weary asses, laden with creels piled up with mussels. Charles had been very mysterious at breakfast-time about what he was going to do that day, and had disappeared directly the meal was over with Jack. It seems that Jack had told him some yarn about a "foreigner" (the mountain peasant's way of describing a fellow countryman from a different part of the country to his own), who visited the district one very dry summer and had made a fortune, computed by Jack at £4, out of the pearls he had abstracted from mussels, which Jack said thronged every lake and river.

Charles must have thought by now that our fortune looked like going west in a short time, and that one to take its place would doubtless prove an agreeable surprise to Mary and me, and accordingly had toiled up with Jack and the asses to a mountain lake, where, Jack assured him, the mussels grew on top of one another.

We all walked back to the house together, and so keen was Charles to see his pearls that he and Patsey at once set to work with oyster knives to open the great pile of mussels which Jack had dumped in the stable-yard.

After tea I went out to see how the pearl hunt was progressing, and found them still hard at it, but no sign of a pearl as yet. Robert, who was rather afraid of Charles, now volunteered the

information that "Them mussels was no good," but Charles took no notice. After opening several more hundred mussels Charles asked why they were no good, and Robert then explained that only those which grew in running water contained pearls, and that, if Master Charles would go with him to-morrow, he would show him where to get the right mussels. Charles laid down his knife and walked into the house without a word.

Soon after this we had a small flood, and the river-watchers reported that no grilse had come up, but that they had seen a small run of late spring fish making their way up the ladder at the mouth of the Duffmore river.

Jack was sick at the time, so Charles fished alone and Robert accompanied me, and on this occasion we took different banks. Robert and I delayed at the falls, watching a seal which was apparently of the opinion that there were still some spring fish to go up, while Charles went on ahead, and we did not overtake him until we came to the pool where he had stuck in Mrs. Hughes's old cow. Here we found him playing a good fish, and he pointed with pride to another lying on the bank, which he had killed about half an hour before.

We went on to the pool above, fished it without result, and were on the point of going on higher when we heard piteous calls for help from Charles. Rushing back, we found him in a terrible predicament, trying to land his fish, which was still in the water and which had taken a mad fit, and at the same time hunt away an old, long-eared sow,

which was making determined efforts to eat his fish on the bank.

Charles would make a fierce rush at the sow with the handle of his gaff, and at once his fish would charge down the river, and he would have to follow. Then the fish would quiet down, and out of the tail of his eye he would see the sow starting on his precious fish in the hand. At once Charles would forget all about the fish in the river, and charge for the sow, and at intervals he would spare a fraction of a second to curse us for not coming to his assistance ; but Robert said he could not swim, while I was enjoying the show too much, and explained that I was afraid of catching a chill.

At last Charles got really vexed when he saw that the sow had already demolished the head of the fish, and made an attack, this time with the business end of the gaff. Probably his idea was to drag the fish away, but unfortunately the gaff went home in the sow's snout. And the result was great.

As though encouraged by the piercing squeals of the sow, the spring fish redoubled its efforts to regain its freedom, while the sow, half mad with pain and fright, strove with might and main to drag gaff and Charles to Mrs. Hughes's pigstye. And there stood Charles between the devil and the deep blue sea ; if he let go his gaff he would never be able to land his fish, and if he went with the sow he was sure to lose his fish. And all the time his line was fast running out, and the sow, sticking her feet into the ground and getting her

back well into it, was heaving like a twenty-stone policeman at the end of a tug-of-war rope. It only wanted Mrs. Hughes and her long tongue to appear to complete the picture, but by bad luck, according to Robert, she had gone to market ; at any rate, she never appeared, doubtless to Charles's great relief.

Charles is slow at making up his mind, but the sow settled the question for him by vanishing in the direction of her home with Charles's gaff still buried in her snout.

Thankful for having his mind made up for him, Charles was now able to turn his undivided attention to his fish in the river. Robert threw my gaff across to him, and in a few minutes he had landed his second fish in triumph. But nothing would ever induce Charles to fish that pool again as long as we were at "Rackrent Hall," and sooner than face Mrs. Hughes's long tongue—Robert refused point-blank to go "within the roar of an ass of the auld divil"—he wrote that night to England for a new gaff.

VI

FOR some days we had been thinking of motor-ing to Eastport to see Mr. Paddy Mulligan about sundry repairs to the house which were fast becoming urgent. Charles had written to him several times on the subject, and though he replied to the letters, he always forgot to mention the subject of repairs, confining his remarks to the price of cattle and sheep, and giving a full description of the sport he had enjoyed recently on the Eastport river with the rod.

A good steady drip one pouring wet night on Dash's bed in Mary's room brought matters to a head, and it was decided, in spite of Charles's protest of greasy roads, to start after breakfast, in order to make a direct assault on Mr. Mulligan. Our road ran north, first along the side of the bay, then inland, following the course of the Duffmore river; then through a narrow mountain pass to the open country round the little seaport of Eastport.

We left home in a heavy mist of rain; but before we had gone three miles the wind suddenly veered, the clouds began to lift off the mountains, and in the turn of your hand the sun came out, first shining through the fast thinning clouds, and then

lighting up the whole landscape—a complete change between the two extremes of a gloomy, wet day and a brilliantly fine one in the space of not more than half an hour.

But when within a few miles from Eastport the wind backed, the clouds came down again, and we drove down the long, steep hill to the town in a steady drizzle of fine rain, and one's first impression was of suddenly having come upon the dirtiest and most depressing town in the world : a startling contrast to the magnificent scenery we had just passed through, and a change from the handiwork of God to that of man with a vengeance.

The town of Eastport consists of one long main street with numerous narrow side streets running out of it, and out of these various squalid culs-de-sac, so narrow that it is said to be possible to shake hands across them from the upstair windows. And over all towers the great steepleless Roman Catholic chapel, shaped like a gigantic oblong box of limestone, a glistening black in the damp atmosphere, making the wretched houses look even smaller than they were, and by its magnificence accentuating their appearance of poverty.

It was a market day, and the dirty main street was packed with country people ; some standing about in groups gossiping, while others, who had just arrived, were unharnessing their horses and asses outside the shops they dealt with, leaving their carts anyhow and anywhere in the street. And at the corner of every side street lounged a group of corner-boys, hands in pockets, and

amusing themselves by criticizing every new arrival.

On the edge of the footpath were many stalls, some selling a kind of seaweed, which Patsey told us afterwards the country people chew, deriving great comfort and virtue from it, others offering tin cans and pails; while at each end of the street men were auctioning secondhand clothes and shoddy harness. And as though the street was not sufficiently congested already, the country people bringing carts of turf for sale must needs take up their positions outside and in between the stalls. Several times Charles had to stop, and with difficulty we reached the hotel yard, where we left the car.

Before interviewing Mulligan, Charles insisted on going to see a boat-builder, who lived on the riverside, and from whom he wished to buy a boat to put on a lake which Robert told us used to be famous for brown trout, and had not been fished for some years. We found that he had a good-looking boat the right size just finished, and arranged to send a cart in for it the following day.

After leaving the boat-builder's shed we waited by the river to watch a salmon-net just being hauled in. Half the town must have been leaning over the walls along the river banks, and the contrast between these cheery, laughing people and their dismal town was very marked.

We then made our way to Mr. Mulligan's shop. The undertaker proved as original as his letters, and so talkative that neither Charles nor I was

able to get in more than a few words at a time edgeways. Charles got as far as "My sister's dog kept awake," when Mulligan started to try and sell him a brace of red setters, and when he paused for breath or whisky I made an effort, and got as far as "There is a leak," only to be seized by the arm and dragged off to a horrible vault filled with whisky and porter casks, and asked with a loud laugh: "Which cask will I be after leaking for ye?" In the end Mr. Mulligan promised to have everything put right on the very next day, "Maybe sooner," and seeing that the man was too much for us we retreated, before he might blarney us into buying his dogs or whisky.

On leaving the shop we saw a weird-looking old man capering in the middle of the street and violently ringing a large handbell above his head. Suddenly he stopped, and in a loud and raucous voice shouted out: "To-night, to-night, Grand Social Concert to-night in the Town Hall, Eastport. Grand bootlaces, long, strong and durable—two a penny." A pause while he capered and finally rocked on his heels, and with a wild laugh: "Sure they must be rotten at the price!" And away he went down the street, waving the bell over his head and howling with laughter.

To stand in the street of an Irish provincial town is always fatal, and besides our interest in the bell-ringer's performance must have proclaimed us strangers, with the result that when we started to move we found ourselves hemmed in by beggars: old, young, female and male, and all dirty. One

old woman, carrying a basket of highly scented "real Dublin Bay herrings," faced Charles, demanding money, whichever way he turned. Charles would undoubtedly have got the better of the ancient fishwoman, but the smell of her fish was too much for him, and, hastily taking what he thought was a sixpence out of his pocket, he threw it into her basket and turned to make good his escape.

Hardly had we got clear when he heard a shout behind us, and, turning, saw the dreadful old fishwoman making straight for us at a fast trot, and when she got near Charles saw to his horror that she was holding up a half-sovereign in her fingers, and realized the mistake he had made in his panic.

Of course we should have fled at once, but Charles seemed rooted to the ground, fascinated by the sight of his lost half-sovereign. Before we could move she was upon us, followed by the rest, and down on her two knees in the street with prayers for Charles's "sowl." Then she struggled to her feet, still calling down the blessings of heaven on Charles, and made frantic efforts to embrace him.

Probably the smell of the herrings caused Charles to lose his head, for without a pause he threw a half-crown into the woman's basket and begged her to be quiet and go home; but of course this only increased the fervour and intensity of her prayers. "God Almighty Himself above in the canopy of heaven never made a finer gintleman, so He didn't."

By this time we must have been surrounded ten

deep by all the beggars in the town. Like wildfire a report had run through the place that a mad Englishman was after landing on the mail train. That he was either mad, drunk, or both, or had robbed a bank, and that he was scattering half-sovereigns as easily as a drunken pig-buyer from Limerick would scatter halfpennies after a pig-fair.

Luckily at this point two huge R.I.C. constables appeared on the scene ; the beggars melted away like snow, and Charles dashed like a hunted hare for the hotel yard, started up Lizzie, and sat in her with the engine running until we were ready to go home. And as soon as I had collected Mary and her numerous purchases, Charles drove Lizzie through Eastport like an armoured car, swearing that he would never bring us there again. Even Mary was amused at the loss of Charles's half-sovereign, not to mention his half-crown, and proceeded to get some of her own back over the farthing episode in Dublin.

A few days after the arrival of Charles's boat, he and I drove out to the brown trout lake, Lough Alone, taking Jack with us to help Charles to row. We drove due east through the mountains for several miles until we came to the verge of civilization, and there, in a hollow of the hills, lay the lake, a sheet of dazzling blue in the spring sunshine. At first glance the valley appeared to be uninhabited, but gradually one's eye caught the thatched roofs of cottages hidden away in tiny valleys within the valley, and sometimes showing a peep of white-washed gable-ends. Of fields, in the regular sense,

there were none, but here and there patches of a few square yards of cultivated land, mere pockets in the great waste of heather and boulders, and fenced round with the stones which the owners had laboriously cleared off the land—one of the many districts in the West of Ireland where the men, after putting in their small crops in the springtime, go off to England as “harvesters,” starting with the hay-crop in Lancashire, and finishing with potato-digging in the Fen Country ; returning home in the late autumn or early winter with a few hard-earned pounds. And it is not uncommon in a poor district of this kind to find two neighbours, one of whom speaks with a broad Lancashire accent, and the other you would take for a native of Lincolnshire.

The road ran past the lake, and we left Lizzie at a cottage on the roadside, where lived the man in whose charge Charles had left the boat. In reality we found that the lake was divided into two by a narrow neck of rocky land, but joined together by a canal about twenty yards long, so that fish had easy access from one part to the other : but in spite of this the trout were totally different. In one part, which had a boggy bottom, the trout were very dark-coloured and played badly ; but in the other, which had a whitish marl bottom, the trout were as silvery as sea-trout and played like tigers.

At first we had only a light but hard north wind, not enough for fly-fishing ; so we amused ourselves by rowing about looking for likely fishing-shallows.

On the south-west shore were groups of big rocks, and on them as many cuckoos as the ordinary countryman will hear, let alone see, in a season. And they took no manner of heed of the boat, though we stopped within a few yards of them, so intent were they with business on hand, which consisted in cuckooing frantically to each other from different rocks and making a stately bow to each cuckoo. At last one bird flew away, quickly followed by a second, and gradually all disappeared in pairs. And though they did not return to the rocks throughout the day, we could hear them calling to each other from the higher ground on every side of the lake.

Rounding a patch of high reeds we came suddenly on top of a small flock of mallard, their brilliant colouring showing up vividly in the bright light: a sure sign that their mates were sitting on their nest not far away—probably in the heather a few yards from the lake.

Whinchats were common, chatting at each other continuously from the tops of every patch of blazing yellow gorse; while from a small fir-wood came the cooing of wood-pigeons, one of the most peaceful sounds in the world. And in the low bog-myrtle growing at the very water's edge, tiny little brown wrens flitted from bush to bush, never still or easy for more than a few seconds at a time.

As ever, Nature left alone was perfect, but, as so often happens, the scene was spoilt by the hand of man. On the shore of a small bay, where the ground was high and level, we came across a hideous

concrete wall about twenty feet square, just a plain, ugly wall sticking out of the ground for no apparent reason whatsoever ; but Jack told us it was a ball-alley where all the lads of the country-side collected on Sundays and holy days to play handball, a kind of primitive fives.

As it was still no good trying to fish, Charles determined to see how his boat pulled, and, telling Jack to pull his best, we started off down the lake at a great pace. Jack said nothing, but I could hear him grinding his teeth, and every time he drove his oar into the water he would let out a mighty grunt. Charles fancied himself greatly with an oar, but before we had gone far Jack, who nearly wrenched the rowlock out of the gunwale every stroke, began to pull Charles round in a circle. Charles then called a halt, whereupon Jack burst into wild peals of laughter, which greatly vexed Charles. After a careful examination of the boat he insisted that she was built crooked ; so it was decided that they should change places, and away we went again. This time Jack could only hold his own, though the grunts grew into roars, and gradually Charles began to get the better of him.

By now the wind had backed to the westward, the day grown softer, and, noticing a rise of fly on the water, I insisted on starting to fish ; and Jack clean forgot his anger at being defeated in the expectation of catching trout.

We found that the natural fly resembled a "Wickham's Fancy," and with this pattern had good sport until a late hour. As we were landing

small flocks of whimbrel started flighting in and settling on the shores of the lake ; probably to rest on their long journey to the breeding grounds in the north—young curlew, Jack called them.

Before starting for home we had tea in the cottage, only to find, when Charles had started up Lizzie, that Jack was missing. After some time we ran him aground in a stable, sitting on an upturned turf-creel, with a mug of poteen in one hand and a hunk of soda bread in the other, thoroughly pleased with himself and things in general, and I knew from the silly grin on his face that he was what Patsey would call “ nicely, thank you.”

Charles ordered him sharply to get up out of that, and to get into the car, but Jack would only chuckle and shake his head, and at the same time making shapes to pour out another mug of poteen from a stone jar. Eventually, with great difficulty and the aid of the farmer and his son, we got the old villain out and into the car, but had to hoist him in like a sack of potatoes, where he sat in a heap in the middle of the back seat, thoroughly delighted with the trouble he had given us, and insisting that he was well able to drive an ass, and that “ any man who could drive an ass could drive a motey-car, so he could in troth,” and at the same time trying to get hold of the wheel.

By the time we got off the light was fast going, and Charles, who was thinking of his dinner, started to push Lizzie along for all she was worth, while I sat in the back to control Jack’s movements.

All went well until we reached a hair-raising

corner half-way down a mountain pass not far from home, where, turning the corner on two wheels, we were confronted by two asses standing in the road, in the common dejected attitude of an Irish ass. Charles had his choice between a mountain ravine, the side of a mountain, or the asses, all of which appeared at the time certain death. Luckily, for once in his life he made up his mind quickly and rightly, and chanced getting between the asses ; and would probably have scraped through but for the sheer bad luck that there happened to be a third ass rolling in the dust between its comrades, and in the bad light quite invisible, its colour blending most successfully with the road.

Lizzie promptly started to loop the loop, but Charles stuck to the wheel like a man and the weight in the back of the car brought Lizzie's tail to earth once more, and we pulled up successfully within a few yards, meaning to go back and render first aid to the unfortunate third ass. Jack, wild with excitement and poteen, leapt up in the car and shouted : " Now, Master Charles, what did I tell ye ; sure, my God, it takes an Irishman to deal with asses "—at this point the three asses disappeared up the mountain-side, roaring and bellowing—and then, at the top of his voice : " I'll have ye fined four pounds before the R.M. next Tuesday."

Lizzie stood the ass-ramming well : we got off with a bent front axle and a twisted wheel, and got home only half an hour late for dinner. Jack was at once handed over to Patsey to be dealt with after his own original fashion—to appear the fol-

The Bay in Summer.



lowing morning his own humble and simple self once again.

Charles must have been more upset by the drive home than I had imagined, as directly after dinner was over he insisted that we should set off at once to the wake of a cousin of Patsey's, who had lived "above on the side of the mountain"—wherever that might mean in this country of mountains. I had had quite enough excitement for one day and was for an early bed, but Charles said that Patsey had begged him as a great favour that we should at least put in an appearance, that it would be a stupid mistake to offend the people, and that we need only be there for a few minutes.

In the end I weakly gave in, and we started off on an outside car with Patsey, a wild stable-boy driving, perched up on the dickey seat. An outside car is without doubt the finest two-wheeled trap in the world : it will carry twice the load an English dogcart will, and, moreover, more than two passengers do not make any difference to the balance. But to the mere Englishman it presents one great difficulty—that of retaining his seat on a bad road, or, in fact, at any time when in motion. To an Irishman it comes as a second nature, drunk or sober, to sit on one in any position with apparent effortless ease, by the simple process of clinging by his big toes to the outer edge of the wing on which his feet rest.

The night was as dark as the famous cupboard into which Pigg thrust his long nose when Jorrocks asked him what of the night, and the going so bad

that the car only seemed to touch the road in spots ; and the boy drove like a Dublin Jarvey returning from Punchestown races. Twice I nearly lost my seat and at last, after bumping an extra big rock, there came a plaintive cry from Charles, and when I felt for him where he should have been he was gone. With great difficulty the driver was induced to pull up, and Patsey retrieved Charles. We were indeed thankful to reach the house of mourning.

Our host and hostess received us at the door of their cottage with stately courtesy and bade us ten thousand welcomes, while we murmured our condolences—Patsey bustling in ahead, acting the part of our *avant-courier*. At first I was blinded by the sudden change from inky darkness to dazzling light, but gradually was able to take in the weird scene ; to be interrupted by the important Patsey, who conducted us to the corpse, laid out on a bed in a corner of the kitchen by the big open fireplace. At first I thought that we were to be formally introduced to the departed, but found that we were only expected to take a pinch of snuff from a saucer poised on the dead man's chest. This ceremony over we were conducted to seats of honour in front of the roaring fire by Patsey and our host ; who proceeded to present us with new clay pipes and savage-looking black cake tobacco, while Patsey offered us our choice of porter or poteen.

The kitchen was quite a good size, the far end from the fireplace being used as a general stable, in which were two little black cows and several calves, about the size of flat-coated retrievers, who showed a

mild and benevolent interest in the unusual throng of strangers, and a shaggy pony who unconcernedly ate his hay from a rack: while above them on rough perches rows and rows of fluffed-out and sleepy-looking cocks and hens of every breed under the sun blinked at us with unseeing eyes—and I was dying to peep under the bed to see if there was e'er a pig there or not.

The room was full of people of all ages and shapes, and through the gathering fog of turf and tobacco smoke I thought that I caught glimpses of most of our servants' faces, to disappear behind some old woman's back the instant their eye caught mine. There was no mistaking Porgeen's long nib or Maria's flaming red hair, generally standing on end like Shock-headed Peter's, from a superabundance of static electricity, as Charles used to say; but the others were so mixed up and through each other that it was impossible to be sure.

For some time after our entry the company was very quiet and subdued, but gradually, under the influence of porter and poteen, they forgot our presence and started to discuss the virtues of the departed, the prospects of the crops, and the price of pigs. Patsey pointed out to us a row of very old women—they might have sat for a picture of witches—sitting on a form by themselves in close proximity to the live stock, and told us they were the keeners, and that he would soon get them into song for us. The usual stone jar of poteen was produced, each old lady given a double ration in a teacup by Patsey, and then they set up the pipes—

quite the most fearsome noise I ever heard ; moans, groans and shrill lamentations. All the while they rocked themselves in unison on the form, beating their hands together, and at intervals threw their aprons over their heads. It nearly drove Charles mad, and he insisted on Patsey stopping them at once at any cost.

For a time the people were silent, the old ones getting down to the drink and tobacco, while the young ones whispered and giggled amongst themselves in the background. Then arose cries of " Maria, Maria, a tune, give us a tune," and the coy-looking Maria, her hair looking redder and wilder than ever, was duly pushed into the foreground by her companions, and the large to-and-fro thrust into her hands.

At first only one couple, bolder than the rest, took the floor ; but when the others saw that nothing awful happened to this pair they started to dance, and in a short time the centre of the room was packed, and each couple only had a small floor-space to twist and turn on, and the booming of Maria's to-and-fro put an end to the conversation of the elders. The dance over, the young ones resumed their giggles and whispering, and their elders had an innings with their general chat.

At this point a middle-aged gentleman sitting near us began to moan and complained that he felt badly, and on Patsey asking him what was on him at all, informed us that he had taken a big dose of salts and how it was after swelling up on him.

Patsey loudly demanded poteen and ginger, but

the ginger was not forthcoming, and the old woman of the house sarcastically suggested that the man had enough drink taken, and in troth that was what was on him, the crayture. As usual, nothing was done, except to argue and chatter, though it is true that Patsey ran his hands over the man and cheered him up by saying that it was bigger he was after getting every minute and that maybe he could burst yet. And he did get visibly bigger as time went on, but nothing was done for him, and the volume of his groans increased in proportion to the size of the man.

At last some one suggested the doctor, but this advice was promptly scouted: "Sure, don't ye know well that that same doctor has only half a lung, and doesn't be out be nights unless by the same token he can see the colour of yer gold."

The people, one and all, appeared quite indifferent to the unfortunate man's fate, while Charles and I sat helpless, and fascinated by the now fearful size of the man's body. At last Charles told Patsey that he really must do something, but couldn't tell him what, and that it would be too awful if he exploded.

I never saw Patsey beat for an idea, and sure enough he came up to the scratch as usual. Suddenly he yelled for a rope, any kind of rope, and when they produced a cart-rope he proceeded with willing assistants to coil it round and round the man's body, in spite of his yells and protestations. "Sure, man dear," said Patsey, "isn't it better to hurt ye than to let ye bust," but the man seemed to

think otherwise. They then proceeded to carry him into the inner bedroom, and to our relief we saw him no more.

Again Maria was in demand for a strenuous square set, in the middle of which there arose an agonizing scream from an old woman of "Oh, my God, Michael's up and awake!" And sure enough the corpse seemed to be sitting up in bed and taking a lively interest in the square set, while the snuff saucer lay in flitters on the floor.

For a fraction of time there was a dead silence, to be broken by screams from the women and oaths from the men, as one and all joined in a head-long rush for the door, carrying Charles and me with them.

In a few minutes we heard our driver yelling for us, and once he had us up on the car he drove full split down the bohereen and away down the road home, where we arrived, very much ashamed of ourselves, as dawn was breaking.

The next day Patsey gave us the explanation of the coming to life again of poor Michael. It appeared that Michael was a hunchback, a "crutcheon" Patsey called him, and, in order to make him lie nice and flat in the bed, a large, heavy, flat stone had been placed on his chest to press his hump well down into the mattress. Doubtless the strenuous square set had shaken the bed, and so displaced the stone, with the startling result we had seen.

But Charles and I had quite finished with wakes, and Charles was very displeased with Patsey.

Some time afterwards I happened to be in Eastport and tackled the boat-builder with having stuck us with a crooked boat. He thought for a moment and then asked : “ Sure, doesn’t yer honour be always having Jack O’Mara pulling an oar with ye ? ” I admitted that we generally did. “ Well,” said he, in triumph, “ sure, that’s why I built her that ways : ye can always be putting that great omadaun pulling on the hard side and kape him quiet.”

VII

WE saw very few visitors at "Rackrent Hall," and one of our few regular ones was a Mayo pedlar, commonly known as the Red Pedlar, though there was not a sign of red on him now with the exception of his nose ; but in his youth he was rumoured to have been the proud possessor of the finest and fieriest pair of red whiskers in the West. And as Patsey put it : " Them same whiskers used to be worth a barrel of stout a month to him, so they used."

" What for ? " queried Charles.

" Sure, weren't all the gentry in the country crazy to buy his whiskers to colour " (tie) "their flies with," answered Patsey. It seemed that in the Red Pedlar's youth one of the most popular salmon flies used to be one called the " Colleen," which had for a body the fiery red whiskers of a true bogtrotter, and for this purpose his whiskers were most suitable, being just the right shade and texture and having a wonderful glint when held up to the light.

The old pedlar drove an asscart which was like the most wonderful bran-pie for producing the unexpected : rosaries, mirrors, buttons, apples, prayer-books, knives, amulets, needles, rolls of

homespun, and even ladies' bonnets, of a type so old that at times they would succeed in catching up the local fashions, came out of the cart at the magic touch of the Red Pedlar. And it was even reported that at the very bottom of all lay bottles of Mayo poteen, "the real stuff."

The old man's appearance driving down the avenue was always the signal for every servant in the place to stop work ; and they would crowd round the cart and spend hours examining his odd collection of goods. Probably most of their small wages found their way into his old leather wallet. And generally he would spend the night with us—in fact, no one ever went away without a meal or a night's lodging—and would amuse the household telling fairy stories by the yard until any hour of the night.

On one of these occasions Jack was seen to buy an amulet after much deliberation and protracted bargaining. The wily old pedlar told him that this amulet was full of great virtue—I forget how many people had blessed it—and that whoever wore it constantly would never be drowned, no matter how drunk he might be ; but on no account must the owner ever take it off, or the virtue would pass out of it for good. Jack's eyes and mouth opened to their full extent as the pedlar unfolded the virtues of the amulet, and never closed until it was his very own, when the maids insisted on securing it round his neck with shouts of amusement.

One of Jack's daily duties was to row across

the bay to meet the mail-car and bring back the post-bag. Except for the fact that his dinner divided the day into two he would probably never have known the difference between morning and afternoon, and the signal for him to start used to be a loud and long tally-ho from the pantry window by Patsey, kept up until Jack was seen to be well on his way to the old boat in which he used to cross the bay. Sometimes the boat would have been taken the previous night by country people and left on the far side: then Jack would return to the house in a towering rage and demand the motor-boat. He was invariably late for the mail-car, and the driver used to hide the bag under a bush by the roadside, where Jack was always delighted with his own cleverness at finding it.

A few mornings after Jack had bought the virtuous amulet from the Red Pedlar, Charles and I were sitting on a seat in front of the house watching two fishing-boats racing up the bay. We heard Patsey's usual tally-ho, and after a time Jack passed on his way to the slip where his boat was usually kept. From our position we could see that the boat was not there, and we waited, expecting him to return with his usual request to be taken across in the motor-boat at once or he would surely be late for the post.

We saw him reach the slip and gaze intently for some time at the place where his boat ought to have been; then he started to return, stopped, and began fumbling at his neck with both hands, and then went back to the slip and started to walk

out into the sea. Luckily the tide was out at the time and the bay quite shallow for a good distance out. Always a slow mover, the unaccustomed feeling of water made him slower than ever, and his progress could not have exceeded a couple of yards a minute.

As soon as we realized that Jack was going to try and walk across the bay, trusting, no doubt, to the virtue of the Red Pedlar's amulet, we rushed down to the slip, and by the time we got there Jack was up to his neck, but by now hardly moving. Charles called to him to come out of that at once, but he took no notice. Not being keen on a wetting, we waited, but after a pause and much arguing he started to go on. I then told him that if he came out at once I would take him across in the motor-boat and give him a big drink of whisky. This made him hesitate and I thought we had won, but the amulet must have got to work, as he started again, after shouting back that the amulet would surely see him across.

We were on the point of wading in after the old fool when we heard the roars of the approaching Patsey and waited. And at Patsey's bitter words of command Jack slowly dragged himself out of the sea, red in the face with fury ; and ever afterwards he insisted that, if we had only had the sense to let him alone, he would have crossed the bay and brought back post and boat.

Owing to the continuous fine weather and the consequent non-arrival of the grilse, we told Robert that he must produce some sport, and, as ever, he

did, in the form of wild-goat stalking. According to Robert, on some of the higher mountains there were large flocks of goats which had never been molested for years, and which had horns as big as elephant tusks. A high mountain across the bay was selected for the stalk, and Mary, who had been listening, elected to go with us and to take Dash, and asked Robert if it was a hard mountain to climb. "Is it that one, miss, sure ye would be eating grass the whole way up to the top?" This was, of course, double Dutch to Mary, who always thought Robert quite mad, and when it was explained to her that the mountain was so steep that she would have to climb with her teeth as well as her hands and toes she gave up all idea of going, but offered us the loan of Dash, which Charles firmly refused.

Charles, who had stalked in Scotland, took charge of the arrangements.

On a fine morning, after a very early breakfast, Jack put us across the bay in his old boat, where we were met by a local guide and two lads, with asses harnessed with the saddles which are used for carrying turf-creels, and which Charles explained would be wanted to carry home the wild goats.

From the house, with a pair of Zeiss glasses, the foot of this mountain had appeared quite close to the opposite shore of the bay, but when we got there we found we had miles of valleys and bogs to cross, and by the time we reached the place I had had quite enough; but Charles was extraordinarily keen, and insisted on going on.

After climbing some hundreds of feet—it seemed like thousands—we used to halt, and I would throw myself down in the heather, while Charles and the guide scanned the mountain for goats; but it was always the same, the goats were higher up, nearer the top, and on we would climb, but never seemed to get any nearer to either goats or top. At last, when I was about done, Charles picked up a flock with his glasses, but they were out of shot except by making a détour of quite two miles. I refused to move, so Charles and the guide went off, leaving Robert and the ass party with me.

And when I had sufficiently recovered to think life worth living once more, I forgot all my woes in the beauty of the view stretching out below me for miles and miles. Probably if we had climbed that awful mountain every other day during the remainder of our stay at "Rackrent Hall," we might never have hit on such a perfect day again, as generally the greater part of the mountain was either in the clouds or else shrouded in mist.

There is no doubt that if one would see the real beauty of a country one must see it from a height, especially in the case of a mountainous country, where one's view on the flat is confined.

On one side lay the open Atlantic, a wonderful deep green, edged with dazzling white breakers near the shore, and beyond a deep lilac towards the horizon. At our feet lay the bay, a still, narrow sheet of deepest blue, in places where the rocky sides were sheer merging almost into black. Across the bay one could see the house and every

part of the large demesne, but on such a small scale as to appear unreal. And beyond, as far as the eye could reach, mountains of every size and shape, and of every shade of colour ; and even while one watched the colours changed, and with this change the shapes and contours of the mountains seemed to change also.

We heard three distant shots, and after a long pause Robert saw Charles making frantic signals, and set off with the ass party to join him. Eventually I saw the party making its way down the mountain, and found that Charles had bagged two goats and a kid ; but if the old ones had fine horns, their smell was finer, and even the unfortunate asses seemed to be trying to get away from it.

When we got home Charles wished the goats taken to the stables, in order that he might remove the horns and have them skinned ; but by now I never wished to see or smell a goat again, and for once asserted my position as an elder brother, and the goats were left at Robert's house.

We found Mary trying to do a deal over some lobsters with a queer-looking old man from one of the outlying islands, whose canoe we had seen at the slip when we landed ; her chief complaint being that several of the lobsters had lost claws, to which the old islander answered plaintively : "But sure, me lady, I couldn't be putting them on again."

A few days afterwards Charles was boring us at breakfast-time with talk of another goat-stalk,

and of how he was going to have the horns mounted, and where they were to be hung, when Porgeen rushed in with the news that there was a mountainy woman from beyont at the door, with a pieceen of paper for Master Charles, and hardly was Patsey able to stop her coming into the dining-room before now. On being told to get the pieceen of paper, Porgeen returned with a dirty half-sheet of note-paper on a silver salver, which he handed to Charles with a broad grin. For some minutes Charles said nothing, then handed the pieceen to me, and I read out the following : "To bridget Faherty for one goateen and its dada and mammy 4 pounds seven shillins."

There followed a long and painful silence, only broken by fragments of Patsey's violent altercation with the angry mountainy woman, which came in through the half-open door in gusts, and the feeling of Porgeen's offensive grin. At last Charles, after asking where Robert was, to be told that he had gone to Eastport for the day, slowly and painfully laid four pounds seven shillings on the salver, and we were never bored by the word goat again.

The glass went up slowly, and then remained high and steady for some days, and as there was no immediate prospect of a flood and grilse, we determined to make an expedition to a large lake about thirty-five miles to the north-east, famous for its dapping. We wired to a man who kept a sporting hotel on the shores of this lake, Lough Rusky, and receiving a reply that you "Could

not see the water for mayfly," started to get our kit together, meaning to go in *Lizzie* the next day.

But in our excitement we had forgotten about Mary, who, out of pique, refused to go with us or yet to stay at home alone, and we lost a valuable day through Charles having to take her and Dash to a spa about sixty miles south.

Pat's hotel, on the very shores of Lough Rusky, is probably the most beautifully situated hotel of its kind in the West of Ireland, and Pat himself was certainly the dirtiest-looking man we had yet met in that country, but the proud possessor of the manners of an emperor.

He told us that the prospects of sport were of the best, and, after promising to have a boat and two good boatmen ready for us at an early hour, we retired to bed. When dressing the next morning I heard Charles, whose room was next to mine, shouting for his boots; and after a time Pat's voice answered from the hall below, asking what he lacked, and then Charles telling him that his boots had not been touched. A pause, and Pat asked where he had left them. "Outside my door, of course," snapped Charles. "Sorr," said Pat, in his grandest tone of voice, "if you had left yer gold watch and chain outside yer door sorra one in this house would have touched them." Which unexpected reply so flabbergasted Charles that he put on his boots dirty without another word, probably for the first time in his life.

Breakfast over, we started to get our tackle

fixed up, while Pat told us of the great size of the Lough Rusky trout, "The finest trout in Ireland." But just as we were on the point of making our way to the waiting boat, a bare-footed boy arrived on a large grey ass with a telegram from Mary to Charles, ordering him to fetch her at once. And without a word he put away his rod, packed a suit-case, and started off in Lizzie.

A fine day towards the end of May in the West of Ireland is a wonderfully pleasant day, and, even if I had not had good sport, I was prepared to be quite content with the wonderful scenery. Lough Rusky is about eight miles long, with a breadth at one point of three and a half miles, and the hotel stands on the southern shore, within a stone's throw of the lake—a square house set down in the midst of rocks, heather and gorse. The east shore is uninteresting, but the west most beautiful: high headlands clad in bracken and gorse, while at many points there were thick woods of small oak, birch and hazel, probably self-sown. And dotted over all the south-west corner of the lake were numerous small islands, some of them nothing but piles of granite rocks, and others clad with the same queer little trees.

Of the many beautiful flies to be seen in early summertime on the lakes in the centre and west of Ireland, none surpass the greendrake for grace and beauty, and a really big rise of mayfly is a sight once seen never to be forgotten.

On most of the large lakes in this part of the country there are to be found large shallows,

called "corrigeens," the bottoms of which are largely formed of that pale, gritty, sandy detritus in which the larvæ of the mayfly love to burrow. The eggs of the mayfly, when first laid on the surface of the water, sink to these sandy bottoms, where they remain until hatched into larvæ, which at once start to burrow, and the colder the weather at the time the deeper they go. And here they stay until the following summer, when the rising temperature hatches them out into mayflies.

Most things in Ireland are pretty uncertain, and the time of the rise of the mayfly is no exception ; a cold or warm spring seems to be the chief factor governing the time of the rise, which may occur at any period from the middle of May to the second week in June.

On the famous dapping lakes in the centre of the country the rise generally lasts for about two or three weeks, while on the lakes further west it lasts as long as six weeks. Most likely there is a greater uniformity of depth in the former lakes, with the result that the fly all hatch out practically together ; while in the western lakes, where the depth varies greatly, the rise will correspond to the different depths, and so is prolonged.

The life of a mayfly is from twenty-four to thirty-six hours. And though this may seem a short life, yet one wonders how any mayfly can live so long with every hand against it. From the minute it starts to ascend from its birthplace to the surface of the water until it rises into the air, every trout in the lake is on the alert to swallow it ; and the

instant the fly flutters into the summer air, every bird, from a gull to a wren, is watching and waiting for it.

On a western lake, when the fly are rising freely, all the small birds of the countryside seem to collect on the lee shores of the lake and every island, and you will see them flying from thorn-bush to whin-bush, gobbling up the fly as fast as they can. On one small island alone you will see chaffinches, tits, wagtails, buntings, whin-chats and wrens; all hardly able to fly, so stuffed are they with mayfly, and with their heads in the air like a cormorant trying to swallow an extra large eel, while the legs and wings of the fly stick out at each side of their mouth like whiskers.

On many Irish lakes the mayfly season is the only period during the year when the trout will rise to the surface to take a fly, and on practically all the big lakes the only time when the very big trout can be caught except by trolling.

The earlier in the season the rise comes the better the fishing will be. When the fly comes up early, but few of them appear during the first week or so, unless the weather is unusually warm, and these stragglers seem to have an irresistible attraction for the big trout. In late seasons the fly are so numerous from the beginning of the rise that the trout are soon gorged, become quickly dainty, and so rise badly.

When we started there was a strong west wind blowing, with the result that the fly, as they rose in the different parts of the lake, were blown towards

the east shore, and here the air was white with gulls hawking ceaselessly after the swarms of mayfly.

The two boatmen, Con and Terry Walsh, first rowed to an island in the south-east corner of the lake, where, by the aid of butterfly-nets, they quickly caught and carefully placed in a specially made wicker basket sufficient fly to last us for the day.

Dapping is a peculiar art in itself, and once mastered is not particularly difficult, except in rough water, when great care is required to keep the fly from being drowned. The ignorant and simple angler, on demanding a dapping-rod from a tackle shop, will find himself presented with a twenty-foot rod resembling the mast of a fishing-smack, which he will use for possibly half-an-hour. After that he will, according to his nationality, either break it in as many pieces as he can, or else endeavour to sell it to a friend greener and simpler than himself. A light fourteen-foot grilse-rod when the breeze is very light, and a twelve-foot trout rod when strong, are the heaviest rods to use. Apart from the fatigue of holding up a twenty-foot pole for hours, it is nearly impossible to play and bring to the net a wild trout with such a weapon. Two blow-lines are necessary: one of plaited silk for use in a strong wind, and one of the lightest and airiest gossamer floss silk to keep the fly well away from the boat when the breeze is of the lightest. At the end of the blow-line, which is spliced to the reel line, is attached two feet of the finest gut. And

the reel-check must be smooth and light, in order to play without breaking a wild five to eight pound trout on such fine tackle.

There is a wonderful fascination in watching the mayfly just barely tipping the water. Suddenly the water breaks slightly—sometimes in heavier water you miss it—the fly disappears, you strike at the right moment, and in a flash the line tightens and you are battling with the first mad rush of a heavy trout in the pink of condition.

Quickly I forgot everything in the world, my whole mind centred in the greendrake dancing and tripping over the waves, always expecting it to silently and slowly disappear. Towards evening the rise went off, and we made our way back to the hotel with a fine basket of two dozen beautiful trout, ranging from a pound and three quarters to seven and a half—not a small trout amongst them.

Charles and Mary turned up about an hour later, both looking, as Pat expressed it, as cross as the hind leg of a cat. I asked Charles what had happened, but he had no idea, and throughout dinner neither of them uttered. However, afterwards, in the sitting-room, Mary could contain herself no longer and poured out her woes.

She had been insulted, grossly insulted, and that was why she had wired for Charles to fetch her away at once.

Mary had read in some Irish paper that the Spa was famous for its waters, which, according to the same paper, would cure anything, being, in fact, a kind of natural patent medicine, which could be

taken internally or externally as desired. The morning after her arrival she trotted off with Dash to look for the bath-house, expecting to find a palatial building such as you would see at Bath or Harrogate. After hunting for some time an old woman pointed out a dilapidated-looking building and told her that it was the bath-house, and if she wanted a bath she would be sure to find the attendant in a certain pub.

Of course, if she had had any sense she would have now gone back to the hotel, but the difficulties only seemed to whet her appetite for a bath. After a lot of persuasion and argument she found the attendant, an old man, in a pub., and they proceeded to the bath-house, where it was settled that Mary and Dash should have a shower-bath together.

Mary undressed and entered the shower-bath apartment, a kind of wooden box, pulled every string and wire she could find, but nothing happened. She then opened the door and called for the old man. At once a voice came from a hole in the roof. "Hi, miss, if ye'll turn the laste bit in the world to the west ye'll do fine"—and followed his words by deeds, in the form of boiling hot water from a large watering-can, which nearly blinded Dash.

And that was why Charles missed his day's dapping. I thought of the great fishing I had had, and thanked my stars that I had never learnt to drive Lizzie.

The next day Charles and I had good sport in the morning. Charles also had an exciting

time with a fresh-run seven-pound grilse, which gave fine play. But after noon the weather began to change rapidly, the trout refused to look at anything, and we arrived back at the hotel at tea-time in a heavy downpour.

There was in the hotel sitting-room an ancient, musty sofa, which was reserved for Dash's special accommodation. When we entered this room after dinner we found Dash sitting up on the sofa, setting a cushion at the head of it, and, as Mary said, looking most intelligent. A quarter of an hour passed and still Dash remained in his intelligent position. Charles then got annoyed, and took up the cushion to remove it. At once there dropped out of it a mother mouse—followed in a constant stream by her long, weak family, which proceeded to run across the floor in single file, led by their mother, towards the door, and escorted by Dash, barking with joy, but never making the slightest attempt to hurt one of them.

This was too much for Mary, who, though delighted with Dash's sagacity, began to imagine mice in her pillow and rats in her mattress, and insisted on Charles making a thorough search of her room before she would retire to bed.

The following morning came a wire from Robert, to everyone's relief, saying that there was a grand flood and that the grilse were landed ; and we were not long taking the road for home.

VIII

WE had fearful difficulty to pack everything into the car, Charles prophesying every kind of accident, and when we left Pat's hotel Lizzie looked like a gipsy's caravan, with suit-cases tied on everywhere and Dash's kit fastened on to the top of the bonnet with string. And Mary and the dog were nearly invisible in the back seat, which was also piled up with fishing gear. Charles drove slowly and carefully until we got to Eastport, where a sudden spurt and an extra bad pothole put Lizzie's back axle out of action, and we had to leave her there to be repaired. Charles wanted to hire a three-ton lorry, but in the end we managed to squeeze into a large hired car, and got home without further mishap in torrents of rain.

There was the usual full parade of servants to welcome us home, except Porseen, who was in bed with an accumulation of small pains. Robert was dancing with excitement at the prospect of good grilse fishing, and told us that they were falling over each other trying to get up the Glenowen river, and that we must be ready to start fishing the instant the flood cleared.

I told Patsey to give the car-driver a meal, and

a good glass of whisky afterwards to keep the wet out, to be informed that devil a drop of whisky or poteen was there in the house—that old snake of a Porgeen had it all scoffed. In fact there was nothing left except Master Charles's Benedictine and Miss Mary's lemonade crystals ; and it would be a sin to give grand stuff like Benedictine to an ignorant motey-man, and Miss Mary's crystals might poison him, but, as no one had ever been known to leave the house without his fill of whisky, or maybe poteen, he would have to give him the Benedictine.

Shortly afterwards I heard Patsey and the driver go into the dining-room, and then Patsey's explanation of the unpardonable absence of whisky and poteen, followed by: "But did ye ever taste Benedictine, Pat ? 'Tis made by the holy monks." Then through the open door I saw Pat swill off a liqueur glass of Charles's best Benedictine, and, after contemplating the empty glass for some time, he said to Patsey, "That's gran' stuff. God bless the holy monks whatever, but to hell with the man that blew that glass for shortness of breath." And Patsey had to give him two more glasses before he was satisfied and would start for Eastport.

So fine was the next morning that you would never imagine that it could rain at all in the country, and after an early breakfast we set off for the Glenowen river, with Robert and Jack in attendance. And as the wind was straight down stream we settled to each take one bank.

The Glenowen river was of quite a different type to the Duffmore ; broader, shorter, and not nearly so rapid, it resembled more a river running through a flat country. And, draining two large lakes, it had the additional advantage of keeping up to fishing level for a much longer time.

When Robert and I reached the river bank we found the water was still too thick for fishing, and, after picking out a dry spot under a sheltering bank, we sat down to wait and smoke.

After about ten minutes Robert drew my attention to the opposite bank of the river, which was honeycombed with rabbit-holes. At first I only saw about half a dozen rabbits, apparently carrying on in the way rabbits usually do. But when I watched closely I saw that the numbers were increasing rapidly ; not a second passed but a rabbit came stealthily out of a hole, crept forward a few feet, and then crouched as still as a log. And Robert pointed out to me that all their heads were turned towards one hole in the centre of the burrow at the top of the bank.

At last they ceased to come out, and for several minutes nothing happened, though not a single rabbit moved an inch. Then suddenly out darted a single rabbit, as Robert said, "as though the devil had him by the tail," its ears flat on its back, to run round frantically in a circle twice and finally subside in a heap in the middle of its companions. Again for some minutes nothing happened, and I began to think that every rabbit in the burrow had gone mad. A gentle nudge from Robert,

and my eye caught something moving out of the centre hole ; it moved a little more, to send a perceptible quiver through the crouching rabbits, and I saw that it was the wicked little head of a weasel, its eyes on fire. Another pause, and the weasel started to draw himself slowly out of the hole in a careless fashion, as though he had only been paying a call and was now on his way home.

Twice the rabbit in the centre of the circle made a wild bound, to send an answering uneasy shudder through its hypnotized brothers and sisters, and each time the weasel stood stock still with a fore-leg held up in the air, and its victim at once collapsed into a heap again.

Slowly the weasel began to draw near to its unfortunate victim, but when it got within three feet the rabbit gathered itself together, preparatory to taking flight should its enemy approach any nearer. The weasel stood as though turned to stone, and then began to dance, pirouette and turn somersaults round and round the rabbit, which gradually sank back on its haunches and followed every movement of the now apparently quite mad weasel.

Round and round went that wicked little weasel in an ever narrowing circle, and above two larks nearly burst their throats with their glorious music, like an orchestra at an evil melodrama.

I could stand it no longer, and let a roar at that devilish weasel, which at once stopped its horrible death-dance and turned towards the direction from which the sound came, every hair on its body

bristling with rage. But not a rabbit moved, and the dance started once more.

At last the end came ; the weasel danced itself within springing range, turned a last mad somersault, and lit like a flash on the rabbit's neck, and its teeth bit deep into the skull of its nearly senseless victim. Before it died the rabbit gave one piteous screech and broke the spell, and every rabbit shot down its own particular hole.

The river took longer to clear than Robert had expected, and to kill time while waiting he started to tell me the history of Jack O'Mara and his half-sister Kateen, the hen-woman, who were really strangers to the place, though Kateen had spent all her life there and Jack the greater part of his.

Jack originally came from a village in the mountains across the bay ; I saw the place afterwards, and at a distance it literally appeared to be clinging to the side of the mountain, and fully justified its name of the Eagle's Nest. And so poor were the inhabitants that, as Robert put it, it was a mystery to themselves how they managed to live, let alone to other people.

In one of the poorest of these cabins in the Eagle's Nest lived Tim O'Mara, his wife, and their only child Jack ; but Jack hardly ever saw his father, as he used to spend the greater part of each year working in England.

One very wet summer, when the potato crop was nearly a complete failure, Mrs. O'Mara had the greatest difficulty to keep herself and Jack alive, and probably only the hope of Tim returning

in the autumn with his year's savings kept her going. But instead of Tim came a letter to say that he was dead and buried beyond in Lincolnshire, and the unfortunate woman found herself faced with a long wet winter and neither money nor potatoes.

Mrs. O'Mara had lived in a village near the demesne before her marriage, where she still had relations who had returned from America with money ; and, sooner than see Jack starve, she determined to cross the bay to these relations and offer herself as a servant.

In those days there was a ferry-boat running across the bay, worked by a man called Martin Hoban, who lived in a cottage on the shore of the bay inside the demesne. Mrs. O'Mara and Jack crossed by the ferry and made their way to the relations' cottage, only to find that they had sold their farm and returned to America. Nothing remained but to return to the Eagle's Nest ; but when they reached Hoban's cottage it was dark night, and the bay so rough that the ferryman refused to put them across. In the end Hoban, who was a bachelor and lived alone, took them in for the night, and there they remained for several years.

In time Jack found himself with a little sister, Kateen, and by the time they were grown up the family had come to live in the "big house," of which Martin had been the caretaker when the place was unoccupied.

Hoban seems to have been a queer character,

more poacher than caretaker, and his education of Jack appears to have been drastic. According to Robert, as soon as the boy was old enough he was yoked with an ass and made to plough. Hoban also taught Jack to work a boat most skilfully while he fished for salmon ; chiefly by the frequent use of a footspur on Jack's back.

In time both children joined the army of servants above at the big house—Jack as an under gillie and Kateen as a hen-girl—though they continued to live in Hoban's cottage. Their mother died, and in due course Martin followed her, the ferry was given up for want of a successor and the cottage required for some farm-labourers, but nobody seemed to know where Jack and Kateen were to live.

In the end a party of country people, possibly out of kindness, but probably because they feared they might be landed with the orphans, gathered together on a holiday and built a sod house for them in a bog to the south of the big house. And here Jack and his sister were living with a goat and some hens and ducks when we first went to “Rackrent Hall.”

Occasionally in winter-time, after heavy rain, there would be a foot of water in Jack's castle ; then they would turn out the goat into the bog to shift for itself, and pay a visit to some neighbour until the flood had subsided. But on the whole they were perfectly happy and contented, and thought the world of their bog hut. Kateen used to sleep in the kitchen with the hens, while Jack

and the goat kept each other warm in a kind of cupboard at one end of the houseen.

At last Robert pronounced the river fit to fish, and I was thankful to get to work at last. The river was about ten miles long, but the first two miles below the lake were of no use, being shallow and fast-running, and not holding fish. In order that we should not be fishing the same pool together, it had been settled that Charles should start at the highest pool, while I was to begin two pools below him.

Robert was a great believer in silver and blue for fresh-run grilse, and I mounted a Silver Doctor for a tail fly and a Blue Doctor for a dropper. I found several of the pools very hard to fish well owing to the strange vagaries of the stream, which would cross from bank to bank several times in one pool. And it was only by casting well below me that I could keep a decently straight line at all.

Like so many Irish fishermen, Robert fished for salmon in the same way as for trout, keeping the tail fly near the surface and the dropper bobbing on the top of the water, and working rod and line at a great pace. And he would never agree with my theory that spring fish lay deeper in a pool than grilse and were consequently much harder to move, and that the deeper you put the fly down to them the better chance you had of rising them.

We did not rise a fish in the first pool, nor did we see one move; Robert blamed that dirty little weasel. But first cast at the next pool I had a sly drag in midstream. Robert wanted me to sit

down quiet and easy and smoke a pipe before I tried the fish again, but instead I put up a fly two sizes smaller and at the next cast struck in a good grilse, which dashed off down-stream in a succession of what Robert called standing leaps ; and the fish must have been well hooked, as he had slack line quite half-a-dozen times. At the end of the pool the fish steadied himself in the middle of the current, stood on his head, and strove hard to get rid of the fly by hitting the casting line with his tail. Thereupon Robert got very excited and started stoning him as fast as he could pick up and throw ; at last he must have made a good shot as the grilse suddenly darted up the river like a shot out of a gun, to turn two splendid somersaults clean out of the water, and then remain quite still. The last performance must have broken his heart, as after that I had no difficulty in guiding him into slack water at our feet, where Robert slipped the net under him and landed a silvery grilse of six and three-quarter pounds with sea lice still on.

Directly afterwards I lost another grilse in the same pool, a mad fish, which was more out of the water than in while I had it on. Fresh-run grilse, if they jump much, which they generally do, are very difficult to kill, owing to the softness of their mouths when just out of the sea. A stiff rod and reel with a strong check are fatal : your only chance is with a softish rod and a reel check, light and smooth.

I found Robert's knowledge of the river invaluable. Here the fish would lie right under the

The Home of the Wild Goats.



very bank at our feet ; there on the edge of the stream at the far side ; and one had to drop the fly almost on the opposite bank to cover the fish properly. In one pool there were always grilse behind a certain large rock in the middle of the river, and the fly must be cast straight down over this rock to fall behind it at the end of a tight and straight line, and kept there gently twitching, if a fish was to be risen at all : if cast in the usual way at an angle of 45° , by the time the fly reached the lie of the fish the line would be a series of curves and the fly, as Robert described it, in a ball.

While eating our lunch on the bank of the river a tiny bare-legged girl passed carrying a basket, and stopped to admire the fine grilse we had caught and laid out in a row on the grass. After a minute Robert, who was always full of curiosity and mischief, asked her in a coaxing tone, " Phat have ye in the basket agra ? " The child looked from Robert to me and answered, " Phat's that to ye ? " Robert, in a tone of mock surprise, " Oh, will ye listen to the child ! Come now, tell the gintleman phat ye have in that grand basket." And like a flash the child answered, " I will not. Would yerself tell phat any fool asked ye ! " and, clutching her basket tight, she ran away as fast as her little legs would carry her, leaving Robert for once in his life without an answer.

After lunch we did no good until we reached an unusually large pool, and here the sport was fast and furious : literally every cast in one part of the pool moving a fish. One grilse, which after

being hooked never showed once, but zigzagged across the river at lightning speed, must have failed to observe the rule of the river and bumped several of his friends, as his course was marked by alarmed grilse jumping madly out of his way in their headlong flight up the pool. We killed him, and I thought that he would be the last fish to rise in that pool, but the very next cast I was into an otter, only to lose him at the second wild jump. Hardly was he gone when Robert drew my attention to another swimming up the middle of the pool just below the surface, and making a peculiar wake : splitting the water was Robert's description and a perfect one. After that we neither moved nor saw another fish in that pool.

Charles and Jack caught us up at the last pool, and there was great excitement when it was discovered that we each had eleven grilse ; and as I had been leading rod so far Charles was given the honour. It was now getting late, and the sun sinking fast, while the wind had scarcely died away, but the water was broken in many places by the boils from salmon pits and big submerged rocks.

Charles wasted no time, but started off at once casting in his usual mechanical way, every cast at an exact angle of 45° across the river, and fished out in the same manner and at the same pace : while behind him crouched Jack, eager to stick his great gaff into the twelfth fish and defeat us.

When Charles had got well ahead I was on the point of starting, when I heard a hoarse whisper from Robert : " Whist, take yer time. Put up

the biggest fly in the box, drop her into yonder grand boil and be after kaping her there." And the cunning Robert was right; for after putting up the biggest fly I had and keeping it working in the grand boil for about half a minute I felt a tug, and the scream of the reel was drowned by Robert's yells of triumph.

Charles did not even turn his head and went on fishing for all he was worth, but Jack started to hop up and down the bank, and Robert declared afterwards that he could hear him grinding his teeth from the agony of his rage.

But Robert's triumph was short-lived; a wild shout from Jack told us that Charles had met a fish, and the excitement all round rose to fever heat. Twice Charles's fish came perilously near mine, and even the polite Robert could not help saying: "Now, Mast' Charles, fair play's a jewel." But Charles said nothing. His whole attention was centred on getting that twelfth fish on the bank before mine. By now both Robert and Jack were half in the river, with gaffs stretched out, waiting for a chance to drive them home.

Suddenly a curse from Charles, the first and last word he spoke, and I saw his rod straighten; Jack had missed the fish and cut his line. And the infuriated Jack promptly started to wade out into the river after the fish, to be caught and pulled back by Charles; and then to sit down on the bank and burst into tears, while Charles stood grimly by and nobody uttered.

For some minutes my fish had remained omin-

ously quiet, and, thinking that Robert might get a chance with his gaff before the fish woke up again, I shortened the line and started to guide him in towards the bank. One tremendous jump and fish and fly were gone, and Jack's tears quickly changed to laughter.

Back to the head of the pool we went. I tossed up a coin, and, Charles winning, he started off fishing once more. In the meantime Robert had produced a cast like a cart-rope and a large white fly, and attached them to my reel line.

By now it was nearly dark, and at times I could only locate Charles by the swish of his rod. We had scarcely reached the end of the pool when a shout from Jack told us that Charles must be in a fish, and the next cast my rod was nearly snatched out of my hands, and I guessed that I must be in a spring fish.

As bad luck would have it, Charles's fish insisted on going up-stream close to the bank at my feet, while mine bolted straight for the sea, making white water. I tried hard to hold him and must nearly have dragged him out of the water, for he churned it up white like the screw of a steamer; but he was too strong for me, and when the rod began to give out warning cracks I had to let him go.

Something had to go, and of course it was Charles's light cast, unequal to a tug-of-war with my cart-rope, and we could see the top of his rod fly straight against the sky. Jack now literally howled with rage, and threatened me with every penalty

he had ever heard of, including the wrath of the Resident Magistrate the following Tuesday.

But the end was not yet, and even Jack became silent with astonishment when two fish, a large springer and a grilse, jumped close together in mid-stream, showing up like two flashes of phosphorescent silver against the black water.

After this both fish kept quiet, though at times I could feel a light and a heavy tug on the line, and, winding up as fast as I could, I gripped the line and dragged the fish towards the spot where I could hear Robert splashing in the river and breathing heavily.

Probably they were not the first fish Robert had gaffed in the dark, and how he did it I could not see, but in two shots he had both fish out and on the bank. Luckily he met Charles's grilse first, and his cast, which was wound round mine and held by the two droppers having fouled each other, at once snapped.

The excitement over I felt horribly tired and hungry, and was thankful to get on to the outside car waiting for us as soon as Charles and Jack had crossed the river by boat at the mouth.

The drive back along the shore of the bay, though short, was wonderful. The sea was quite calm and looked like burnished silver tinged with a faint blue. On each side towered the mountains, black where they met the sea, then blackish purple, and at the top the last rays of light made the rocks show up like dull steel.

We heard several snipe crossing from our side

to feed in some marsh in the opposite mountains, and from the shore came the wild call of curlew and the plaintive cry of redshanks.

Jack never spoke during the drive, and he confided to Robert afterwards that he was in great dread of me as it was quite certain that I must have paid at least £4 to the devil himself for an amulet. “ Why ? ” asked Robert.

“ Every why,” replied Jack. “ Faith, he couldn’t lose a fish if he wanted to.”

IX

EARLY in June the mackerel made their appearance round the coast, and on days when there was no salmon fishing we used to go out in the bay and often catch mackerel as fast as we could haul them in. At first Robert was prejudiced against the motor-boat, thinking that the propellers would scare the fish; so one day we determined to settle the question of propellers versus oars. Charles fished with Jack in a rowing boat, while Robert and I took out the motor-boat. During the first hour Charles had much the best of it, Robert being unable to make the engine run slow enough. I then got a large sack, stuffed it with hay, and put it across the stem at the water-line, which had the desired effect of greatly reducing the speed of the boat. During the next hour we caught three mackerel to Charles's one, and came to the conclusion that, far from scaring the fish, the propeller actually attracted them.

Towards the end of June the whiting came in, and we often went out for an hour or two in the evening to catch some for dinner and breakfast: the difference between a whiting straight out of the sea and one on a London dinner-table, after

passing through Billingsgate, must be tasted to be believed.

We found that the whiting always took best just before and after sunset; some days we could not catch any except at this time. At first we used the usual blunt tinned sea hooks and snooding; and as a result missed far more fish than we caught. We then tried sharp salmon hooks and fine gut, and killed quite four times as many whiting as before, besides hardly ever missing a fish. At times dog fish made whiting fishing impossible, taking bait, hook and gut with them.

On more than one occasion a school of porpoises rolled close past our anchored boat, and we could see the water ahead of them iridescent with the flashes of millions of tiny silvery fry.

The mackerel we used to find in all parts of the bay, but often had to cruise about for an hour or more before we could strike them, though sometimes we would get into them directly the boat left the slip. The whiting, on the other hand, were most conservative, and we never could catch them except at three places. Probably the bottom had something to do with this.

Strips of mackerel made the best bait for mackerel and whiting, and when this was not available we used mussels; but this meant renewing the bait after each fish caught, whereas one strip of mackerel would generally catch a dozen fish.

After a very hot summer's day we sometimes went out whiting fishing at night. We generally only caught a few, but the great attraction was the

beauty of the bay and mountains by moonlight, and the wild cries of the different sea-birds.

Our first day's fishing on the Glenowen river was our best, but we had several good days afterwards until the next flood came down, when all the grilse in the river, as well as those fresh run from the sea, made their way into the two lakes, Loughs Nahillion and Naballagh, practically all staying in the former, out of which ran the river. Lough Naballagh, according to Robert, did not fish well until the autumn, when the fish from the lower lake moved up on their way to the spawning beds in the many little mountain streams which ran into the upper lake.

Lough Nahillion was roughly a mile and a half long, with an average breadth of half a mile. Lying in a hollow of the mountains, which ran down to its shores on both sides, with not a human habitation or even a road to be seen anywhere, it was a lonely spot, but at all times most beautiful. All the surrounding mountains were covered with heather, except one at the top end about a mile from the lake, which was green; and when the sun shone on it the colour was like that of a perfect emerald. Along the shores of the lake there were great patches of Mediterranean heath as high as a man's waist, and at one spot traces of old turf banks running down to the lake, showing that at one time someone must have inhabited this lonely valley. And in the centre of the lake there was a narrow island with stunted holly and hazel bushes on the sheltered side.

For a week past the weather had been glorious, though some days it was almost too hot to do much. Then, without any warning, it broke, and for three days and nights the rain came down in sheets, with a gale from the south-west, and we never left the house.

On the third evening Robert turned up at the house, drenched to the skin, to tell us that the next day would surely be fine, and that we must be ready to start early, as we had a long distance to go, and would have to ride as there was no road for the last two miles to Lough Nahillion.

We woke early the following morning to a perfect fishing day : a light, soft westerly wind and warm sun, yet enough clouds. Except for the numerous torrents dashing down the sides of every mountain where there was a ravine, and the wonderful fresh appearance of the land, it might never have rained at all. Before we had finished breakfast Robert appeared at the front of the house with three mountain ponies, and told me that Jack had started two hours before with two asses laden with kit and food.

I think that I enjoyed the ride that day more than anything else, the fishing included. During those sudden and savage storms it was always unpleasant to be cooped up in the house for hours, often for days, but the wonderful air and sunshine which followed always more than made up for the days of inaction.

Soon after leaving the demesne we turned off the road for a track across the moors, which ran

nearly parallel with the river to within two miles of the lake, where it ended at a mountain farm. Here we put up the ponies, and started to walk, as the going was now too bad even for a mountain pony. A mile from the lake we overtook Jack, having a difference of opinion with his asses, both of which wanted to go home.

After leaving the mountain farm we did not meet a human being. Several times we heard the crow of a cock grouse, and once we put up a small flock of golden plover, male birds with their breasts as black as ink. And the higher we climbed the more hares we met.

Robert and I arrived first, Charles having stayed behind to help Jack with the recalcitrant asses. Close to the mouth of the river there was quite a good boat-house, and in it two boats, one good and one bad. And we took the good.

About four hundred yards from where the river left the lake there was a gravel bank running nearly the whole way across, and even with the high water it could not have been covered more than four foot anywhere. And on this bank Robert said most of the grilse rested on first entering the lake. Rowing over to the west side we started to drift across, and had not gone twenty yards before I was into a grilse.

Meanwhile Charles and Jack had got about half-way across the lake in the second boat when we heard shouts from Charles, who appeared to have gone mad. Holding a footspur above his head, he seemed to be on the point of braining

the unfortunate Jack, who was tugging at the oars for all he was worth, and crying out: "Up agin, up agin." Suddenly Charles made a drive at Jack, whereupon the boat completely disappeared, leaving the two floundering up to their knees in the water. And Robert refused to go to their assistance until he had netted the fish.

We found them standing on a shallow part of the bank, on which the boat rested, her gunwales just awash: Charles cursing, but more frightened than hurt; while Jack, crowing with delight, was methodically bailing out the boat with a quarter-pound tobacco tin.

Charles, who hated getting wet more than any cat, told us that when they left the shore he noticed that there was half an inch of daylight between the topstrake and the next plank, but as the boat did not appear to be leaking anywhere he did not bother about it. Afterwards his attention was taken up watching me playing the grilse. Suddenly he realized that his legs were wet; and on looking down saw that water was pouring into the boat, and that it was only a question of seconds before she sank. Yells at Jack to row for the shore produced no result; he merely grinned and muttered something about his amulet.

Charles then grabbed a floating footspur, and threatened him with a beating if he did not pull at once for the shore. The sight of the upraised footspur probably touched some chord of memory of Martin Hoban in days gone by, and Jack started to row like a madman, but, to Charles's horror,

away from the shore. And then the boat gently subsided on the bank. Most likely Jack remembered where he was, and was cute enough to know that he would not have time to make the shore before the boat sank.

Meanwhile Jack bailed away steadily with the old tobacco tin, crooning to himself and thoroughly satisfied with his own cleverness. Charles was for getting into our boat and leaving Jack to complete his self-appointed task, but I refused. In the end Robert and I had to strip and get out on to the bank, when we managed to turn the boat over and empty her. Robert then found where she was leaking, caulked the places with bits of Jack's clothes, and we started fishing once more.

The fishing was good, but tame after river fishing. In lake fishing there is always a feeling of chuck and chance it when casting, every cast being practically a repetition of the last one, and there is a sense of monotony unless the fish are plentiful and rising freely. Nevertheless, an Irish mountain lake on a fine summer's day is a wonderfully pleasant and beautiful sight.

Charles kept fairly close to us in case of accidents, and by the time we felt ready for lunch we had caught eight grilse and a dozen good trout between us, the latter giving better play than any grilse.

We landed at the lee side of the island for lunch at the remains of a tiny stone pier, close to which we found the ruins of a cottage, and behind it a holy well. Robert told us that the owners had

been evicted many years ago in the bad times, and had gone to America. One could hardly imagine a more lovely spot to live in, nor could one help sympathizing with the unfortunate people who had been compelled by force of circumstances to leave such a pleasant home, which they must have loved better than life, and to cross thousands of miles of sea to seek a living, perhaps in the slums of some unknown American city.

Robert told us that when the police arrived to carry out the eviction all left without a murmur, except one old woman, who had known the island as her home for over eighty years. The police tried every way they could to coax her out of her bed, but she refused to budge, and in the end they had to carry her in her bed, screaming and cursing, to the boat.

Charles got away first after lunch, and, after turning at the end of his first drift, Jack rowed straight into us and nearly sank both boats. Charles said he had always found that Jack did not know his right hand from his left. As usual, Jack was pulling away blindly, and Charles, on looking up from changing a fly, saw that his boat was heading straight for us, and, to avoid a collision, shouted to Jack to pull his right hand, thinking, of course, that he would pull his left. But he pulled his right, and we bumped badly.

Jack was shot head over heels into the bow, followed by the curses of Charles in English, and of Robert, too polite to swear before us, in Erse ; and when he had recovered from the shock he turned

on Charles with a grin of rage and cried : " Yer honour told me to pull my right and I pulled her," and with a yell, shaking his fist at Robert, " Poor Jack's not to blame, so he isn't."

After the collision we only caught one grilse, though for about a quarter of an hour we must have nearly risen a fish a cast, but all coming short. Charles caught the last fish, which spent more of its time out of the water than in ; at last it let one tremendous leap close to the boat, lit on the gunwale, and slid off into Jack's lap. For a second he sat like a man in a trance, with mouth and eyes wide open, looking helplessly down at the grilse slithering about in his lap. Robert broke the spell by telling him to be quick and close his mouth or the fish would surely leap inside him. Gripping the fish, Jack started to rock with merriment, and until we landed kept on telling Charles, to his great annoyance, " That's the way to catch 'em, divil a better ever I saw ; sure, Master Charles dear, ye's the greatest fisherman ever came to the west—more power to yer honour."

The weather had started to change at lunch time, the wind backing to the south and taking off all the time, while the sky began to get a queer greasy grey colour, and the mountains showed up so distinctly that they seemed to come nearer every minute.

Gradually the wind died away and the surface of the lake took on a flat, oily look, and as it was useless to go on fishing we landed. After fixing up the boats we sat down on a bank of heather to

smoke and see what was going to happen—probably a heavy shower, and afterwards we might be able to fish—but I could see that Robert was uneasy, though he said nothing.

We must have sat there for half an hour, and I was nearly asleep when the strange heavy stillness was suddenly broken by a roar of wind; a savage squall struck the lake, lashing its waters in a second into a sea of foam, to disappear as quickly as it had come down the valley, carrying with it a mist of spindrift. And once more the same uncanny stillness, and the surface of the lake became like a sheet of black glass. But we had seen enough, and as soon as Jack had collected his asses and loaded up the fish and kit in the creels we set off as fast as we could for home.

We could only have gone about half a mile when the storm burst with a blinding flash of lightning, and at the first clap of thunder, intensified by the closeness of the mountains, the asses stampeded, with tails up and heads in the air, braying for all they were worth, followed by Jack, waving his gaff over his head. We followed as best we could, and saw Jack fall flat in a boghole, to rise up a black man, but still holding on to his gaff, and on after his asses. And then the rain came down in a flat sheet, and swallowed up beasts and man.

Some instinct must have guided Robert straight to the farm where the ponies were. We could not see five yards in front of us for the rain, and I am sure he could see no further. Here we fondly imagined we would find shelter until the storm had

spent itself,' but instead we found the door locked and blinds down over the windows. And Robert cheered us by saying that, "The people would be mostly 'neath the beds."

"Why?" asked Charles.

"Freckened out of their wits at the storm," laughed Robert, "and it would tighten an angel itself to hoke them out of that before the storm quits."

We then tried to get the ponies out, but they were as frightened as the people in the house and would not move an inch, and in the end we had to stay in the stable with them. Luckily, before it was dark the rain stopped as suddenly as it had started, and we rode home at a breakneck pace and into hot baths at once.

Jack did not turn up that night, but the following morning after breakfast Mary rushed into the smoking-room to say that Dash was trying to bite an awful-looking wild tramp, covered with black mud from head to foot, who was endeavouring to drive two miserable-looking donkeys up to the hall door. And we knew that Jack was still alive.

We found him on the drive, looking like nothing on earth, minus half the fish, and with our kit, as Patsey described it, looking as though all the cats of the countryside had had kittens in it. And when Patsey demanded what had happened to him, Jack told us how he had slept out on the mountain-side, and that he would have been perished but that the little people had come to cover him up with heather and ferns to keep out

the lightning, which was that near he could smell it, so he could. By this time Charles had counted the fish and demanded what had happened to half of them. "The good little people took them," answered Jack, and started to snuffle. However, the unbelieving Patsey said it was poteen he had met and not fairies, and, gripping him firmly by one ear, led him off to the yard, followed by the asses and the senseless barks of Dash. And we heard afterwards that Patsey first gave the returned prodigal a sound beating, and then filled him up to the chin with whisky.

We fished often on Lough Nahillion until the beginning of August, and I think enjoyed the fishing there more than any other; probably we liked the wild ride and the beautiful lonely scenery of the lake.

One day, towards the end of July, to all outward appearances a perfect fishing day, we could not even move a fish, and wanted to go home in the afternoon, but Robert insisted on our staying. The lake was stiff with fresh trout after a recent flood, he said, and they were bound to rise some time. We fished away until the sun was setting, and were just on the point of cursing Robert and going home when suddenly the rise came on, and from that on Robert and Jack had a busy time with the nets. Even after it was dark the trout continued to rise freely to Robert's large white flies—*weird things with bronze peacock bodies, black breast hackles, and wings from the quill feather of a white Leghorn.*

It must have been nearly eleven when the rise stopped, as suddenly as it had started, and well after that hour when we set off for home. We had no difficulty in reaching the farm where we had put up the ponies as usual, but here we had to wait for the moon, and went into the kitchen to rest.

We found the family seated round the fire in the dark, listening to the gossip of a little old man, who, Robert told us, was a relation of our host's, a "friend" he called him.

For some time the conversation was confined to the usual topics of the weather, crops, prices of cattle and sheep, and, in order to show a polite interest in us, fishing: but I could see that the old man was bursting to say something, and at last he asked Robert in a loud whisper if he knew Norah Kerrigan. "Why wouldn't I?" answered Robert, "and a fine girl she is"—followed a long silence while the old man fidgeted on his stool unceasingly. Then said Robert to the old man, "What's on ye to-night, Mickey?"

"Faith then, I'm completely bothered," moaned Mickey, but no more would he say.

After a further silence the woman of the house, addressing the fire, said, "It's easy known what's on Mickey the night, the poor fellow can't make up his mind whether to marry Norah Kerrigan or buy another pair of blankets."

On the way home Robert told us that it was a fact that old Mickey had been trying to make up his mind for weeks past whether it would be cheaper to marry Norah or invest in an extra pair of blankets

before the winter. And he added that Mickey, who was as cross as a bag load of weasels, when told by the priest, after the death of his first wife, that she was better off in heaven than living with him, retorted: "Maybe, yer reverence, herself could be better off with me than where she is now."

In the valley of the Glenowen river there was a large area of water meadows, which was let yearly by auction, and was always taken by the tenants whose land produced more stones than hay. One would naturally have thought that this auction would have been carried out by an auctioneer, or, failing that, by the steward. But for some obscure reason it was one of Robert's duties to auction this meadow and collect the money as well. And as we passed these meadows when riding home that night, Robert confided to us that he was going to try to auction them the following day, but that he expected trouble as he had heard in the usual roundabout way that the tenants had formed a ring to boycott the auction, hoping if they were successful to get their winter's hay for nothing. Robert seemed very uneasy when he bade good-night to us at the house, but said that he thought he would be able for them.

The next morning Charles and I rode down to the meadows to see what would happen. We found that Robert had staked out the ground into suitable plots of an acre and half-acre, and had a cart rigged up to hold the auction on. Round the cart all the tenants were collected in groups,

dressed in their Sunday clothes and arguing excitedly amongst themselves.

Sharp at noon Robert mounted his rostrum and started the auction, but failed to elicit a single bid from the now silent crowd. Three times he tried with the same result, and after each attempt he would glance behind him as though he expected something to happen or somebody to arrive. And after his third and last effort we saw one of the house cars rapidly approaching with four great hairy mountainy men on it, one of whom we recognized as our goat-stalking guide from across the bay. Robert jumped down to meet them, shook hands effusively all round, and then walked off with them to inspect the meadows.

Presently we saw one of the mountainy men point out four plots of an acre each. Robert took out a note-book, made an entry, and the buyer handed him a bundle of notes, for which he received a receipt. The crowd now began to murmur. By the time it came to the turn of the goat-stalker, who had seduced Charles into murdering Mrs Faherty's goats, and who apparently had purchased at least eight acres, the crowd was buzzing like a swarm of bees. The four men from across the bay then hurriedly got on to the car, and the boy drove off at a gallop, while Robert started to yoke his horse to the cart preparatory to going home, and looking thoroughly satisfied with himself.

But with shouts of rage the tenants surrounded him, thrust him up on to the cart, and with wild roars insisted that he should auction every acre,

including those already sold to the mountainy men, or he would never go home alive. And the wily Robert not only sold every acre for double the usual price, but actually collected every penny of the rent before he got off the cart—as he said afterwards, for the first and last time in his life.

Riding home with Robert after the crowd had dispersed, we demanded an explanation. And Robert told us that directly we had got back from Lough Nahillion the previous evening he had rowed across the bay, and that it had taken him the best part of the night and two quarts of poteen to bribe the mountainy men to play the dummy at the auction. That he had brought them back with him at dawn and hidden them in a hay-loft in the stables until they were sober, when Biddy had given them the breakfasts of their lives in the kitchen. They were then driven to the auction by one of the stable-boys, who was to drive them afterwards to the slip, from whence Jack was to put them across the bay.

X

BY mere chance Charles discovered that there was on an outlying part of the estate a shooting-lodge, with several thousand acres of grouse shooting. Mr. Mulligan had never heard of the lodge, but Patsey assured us it was there right enough, though in troth it was a terrible backward place and at the back of beyond, but that Robert could tell us all about it. From Robert we learnt that the lodge lay about twenty miles due east on the far side of the mountains, and that this part of the estate had come into the family by marriage some generations back.

We settled to go out to the lodge on the 11th August, and in the meantime Charles began to get into training for the hard walking. Every day, when not fishing, he would play handball with Patsey, Porgeen and Thomaseen, the carpenter, a little man with a red face and white beard, who could not have been far off the pension.

The game resembled Rugby fives without a board to play above, and the only rule which all paid any heed to was to get the better of their opponents by any and every kind of trick they could think of. Charles played with Porgeen, and would never have won a game, though much the

best player, if Porgeen had not been the match of Patsey and Thomaseen in trickiness. Frequently the three old ruffians would argue a point of the game for fully ten minutes, and at the end of the dispute both sides would try to add a few points on to their score, only to be corrected by Charles, who thought that these little mistakes were made in all innocence.

On the 11th of August we set out for the shooting-lodge, accompanied by Robert and two brace of setters. And as Robert declared that the last ten miles of the road were quite impossible for Lizzie, unless she could fly, we determined to ride and to keep the ponies at the lodge. Our kit had started in a cart at dawn, and would have to be carried for the last part of the journey on pack donkeys, sent out from the lodge to meet it.

The last part of the ride was by sheep-tracks over the mountains ; Robert told us that it was possible to get to the lodge by road, but that it was a long way round. About a mile from our destination we passed a regular convoy of asses carrying our kit, and driven by two of the mountain keepers, Jimmy and Paddy.

We found the lodge a comfortable one-storied house on the mountain side, well sheltered by small woods at the back, and from the front a wonderful view to the eastward across miles of green and brown country to a low range of purple hills in the far distance. And on this bright August afternoon the scene below reminded one of an aeroplane photograph. A wide river which ran through the

middle of the valley looked no larger than a tiny brook. Fields and even bogs looked as though they had been laid out with a pair of fairy parallel rulers, while the cottages were for all the world like white dolls' houses—all giving one the sense of looking down from the clouds on earth.

We were welcomed by the head keeper, John Devine, who lived in the lodge with his wife. Mrs. Devine soon had tea ready for us, and afterwards the ass convoy arrived and we were introduced to Paddy and Jimmy.

After supper Robert came in to tell us that the keepers were going to have some music in the kitchen, and would we honour them with our presence, adding that it had always been the master's custom to do so.

The kitchen was a long, low room, obviously much older than the rest of the lodge, with a huge open fireplace, flagged floor, and the usual dresser, covered with jugs, mugs, plates and dishes of all sizes and shapes, common to every Irish cottage.

On our entering Robert presented to us yet a third mountain keeper, James, a little, old, wizened man, dressed like a very shabby butler. We afterwards learnt that at one time he actually had been butler to a retired colonel in England, whose service he had left, to his everlasting regret, on becoming heir to his ancestral mountain farm—he had about as much idea of farming as I had.

Jimmy was about the same size as James, and in appearance the image of Sunny Jim; while

Paddy was as big as the other two put together, and, from spending years in England, had acquired a broad Yorkshire accent.

For a time the proceedings were very staid and dull. Paddy, with the inevitable "to-and-fro," and James and Jimmy, with two ancient piccolos, made up the band, and to this music Robert and Devine danced reels, polkas and square dances with Mrs. Devine and her two daughters.

But a few glasses of poteen soon loosened Paddy's tongue, and Mrs. Devine swept her daughters off to bed after his first story, and disappeared herself at his third with her fingers in her ears.

Jimmy and James must have had heads of iron ; no amount of drink had any effect on them, except to make Jimmy smile more and James to become more polite, if possible. And when Paddy had had enough Robert substituted water for poteen ; whereupon Paddy, imagining that he was still getting the real stuff, would cough and wheeze, to the huge delight of the other two old lads.

I could see that all were prepared to make a night of it, but, having a hard day's walking before us, I packed them off home at eleven. Paddy had only about a mile and a half to go, but the other two lived near a lake quite seven miles away by road. But as it was a fine bright night they went home over the mountains—the near way by the skelps, as Jimmy called it.

It had been settled that we should first shoot some large bogs at the foot of the mountain, and that Devine and Jimmy should accompany Charles

while Robert and Paddy were to go with me. James used not to appear before evening, when he never failed to turn up with his piccolo and a thirst.

When dressing the next morning I heard a hesitating step tiptoeing down the passage : it stopped outside Charles's room, and, after knocking in vain for some minutes, there was silence. Opening my door I was just in time to hear Jimmy, with his head through Charles's door, saying in a hearty voice : " Sober yerself up, Master Charles ; come sober yerself up, or we'll be late for the birds." The situation and insinuation took some seconds to penetrate Charles's sleepy brain, but once they got home prompt action followed. A volley of heavy shooting boots crashed on door and walls within inches of Jimmy's head, and he fled past my room muttering : " The Lord save us, a cross man indeed."

I learnt afterwards from Robert that Jimmy, who had appeared over the skelps at the crack of dawn as fresh as paint, was full sure that the rest of us had been tight the night before, and, on learning that I was up and Charles asleep, was afraid that Robert and I would get away first and shoot all the best places before Charles got a move on.

These low-lying bogs would have been the last place on which I would have looked for grouse in that country, but they turned out to hold a good head of game ; not only grouse, but teal and duck. The bogs varied in size from a hundred to a thousand acres, and while some were dry and easy to travel, others were as wet as one would expect to

find them in the middle of winter, and hateful to cross.

But in between were too many cottages, with the usual number of useless cur dogs, which would turn out in packs at our approach and pretend to attack us with great ferocity. An Irish cur dog will greatly impress a nervous stranger, with his loud, savage bark and his appearance of always being just on the point of charging in and finishing his adversary, who begins to feel very naked about the legs. But they are easily routed. You will think that a dozen of them are going to eat you in another second, but stoop down suddenly as though to pick up a stone, no matter if you are in the middle of a bog where no man ever saw a stone, and see what happens. Every tail goes down as though worked by one string, the savage bark gives place to a timid yelp, and every cur takes the nearest way home at its highest rate of speed.

Practically every bog was used for cutting turf, and one would have thought that the grouse would have become accustomed to seeing people. But the cover was short, and after the first few shots we found it very hard to get the birds to lie to the dogs at all. The dogs would set, then draw on interminably, and finally a cock would crow defiance at us from some small mound a hundred yards ahead, the signal for the pack to disappear over the bog.

Charles relieved the monotony of the morning by shooting an old man. At the time he was following up a pack through some turf banks, where

country people were working, and, being mad at the way the birds were blinking him, was trying to snap them the instant they got on the wing. The old man must have been carrying a creel of turf on his back at the time, and, being bent double with the load and about the same colour as the bog, Charles did not see him when he fired at a bird, which must have flown straight towards the man. Charles downed his bird, but was surprised to see sods of turf hop up into the air for no apparent reason ; but the shouts of the scared-to-death old man soon undeceived him. Most of the shot must have struck the creel, scattering the turf, and I don't think he was touched, but when we arrived on the scene the man's whole family were collected round Charles, demanding impossible sums of money.

But the power and scope of whisky in Ireland are unlimited, and by the time the old turf-carrier had had what Robert used to call two darts of the hard stuff from Charles's flask he was himself again, and a third dart made him pray that Charles might shoot him every day of the week, Sunday included, and welcome.

In the afternoon I grew tired of seeing grouse skimming away across the bogs two or three shots away, and sat down behind a turf-stack at the corner of a large bog, which Charles insisted on shooting before going home.

Presently we heard shots, and after a pause the crow of a grouse flying towards us. Peeping round the corner of the stack I saw a single bird

coming straight at me ; and as it curled past on dead wing, chuckling at having defeated Charles badly, I dropped it dead within thirty yards of the stack. For the next twenty minutes practically every grouse which Charles put up and failed to stop flew within range of my turf-stack, and I had such shooting as made me forget the trials and vexations of the morning.

Charles returned with a brace and a half and asked what I had been firing at. And when Robert showed him seven and a half brace in a row by the turf-stack and the setters still hunting for a brace of runners, he shouldered his gun without a word and headed for home.

We found James waiting for us at the lodge, and after supper, music and poteen followed until a late hour. Neither band nor audience ever seemed to have had enough, and I am sure, if allowed, would have carried on until breakfast. I never grew tired of their weird stories, but after the first few nights Charles did not appear often. On the whole I think that James was the drollest of the lot, especially late in the night, when he would sit bolt upright on his stool, puffing away at his piccolo and swaying to the tune. Gradually the sway increased until at the last note his piccolo would nearly touch the floor.

When it came to breaking-up time this night Jimmy was for going home over the skelps, but James was not for it at any price. It appeared that the previous night they had got lost, owing to the sky becoming suddenly clouded over, and

had had to wait in a cabbage plot until dawn, though no one could explain how they had come to find a cabbage garden on the mountain side in the middle of the night.

Jimmy, who had been up since dawn, and was dog-tired after his hard day's walk, tried his best to coax the ex-butler to face out the skelps, but in vain. All James would say in an obstinate voice was : " Damn yer skelps, Jimmy. It's the long ways I'll be taking the night, and no more sleeping in yer cabbage gardens for me." So the long ways it was, Jimmy was too frightened to go alone—and we saw the two little men on to the road and turned their heads in the right direction. Directly they had gone Robert begged me to go down to a small wood below the lodge, and we would see if the two old lads were afraid of ghosts.

The road ran down-hill, skirting the grounds and passing round this wood about two hundred yards from the lodge. Robert ran back for a pair of chain traces, and we hurried down to the wood.

It was a beautiful summer's night, quite still and fairly light, and presently we could hear footsteps and then the pair came into sight, walking very upright and slowly in the middle of the road, and when they drew near the wood Jimmy started to talk in a loud voice to keep up his courage.

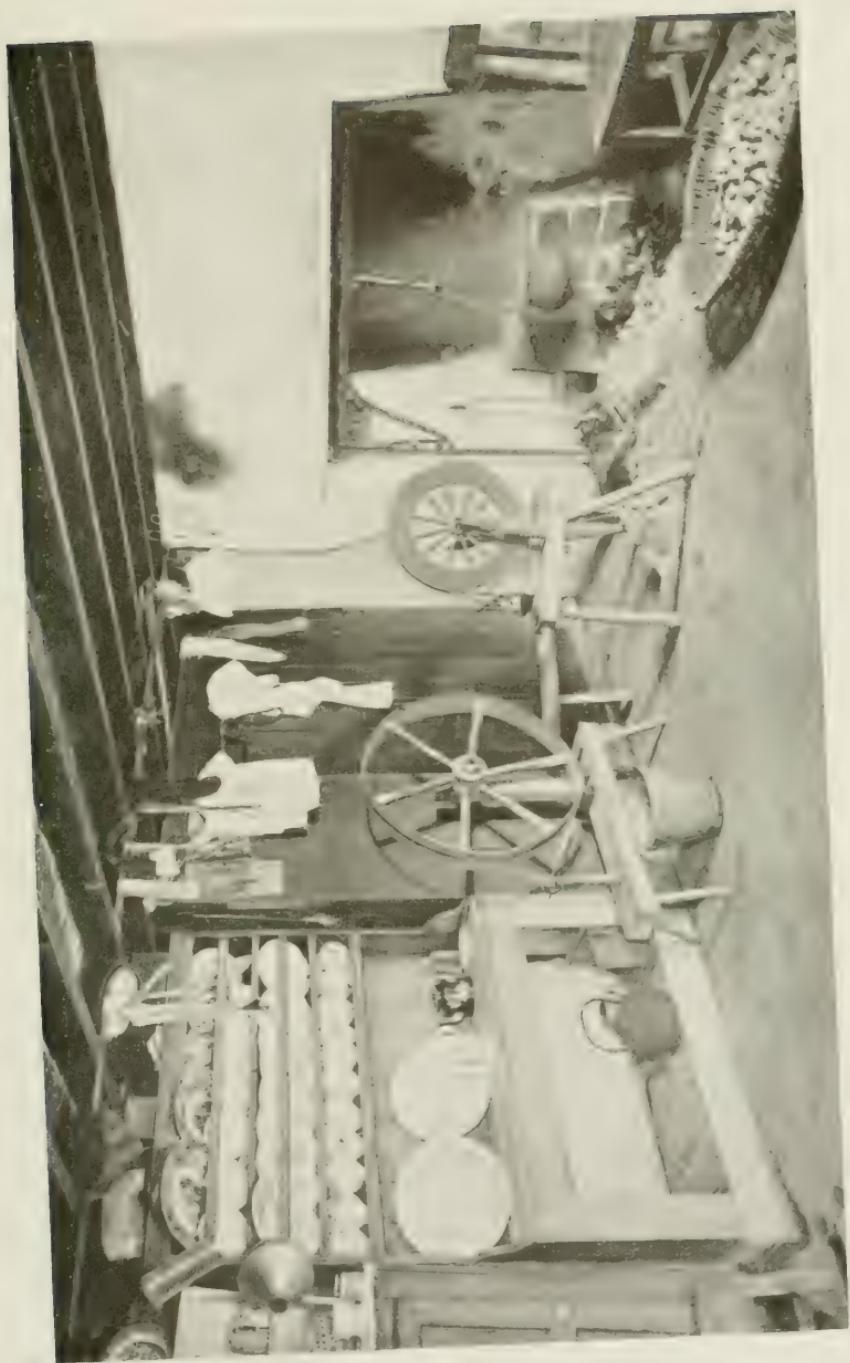
As soon as they were nearly abreast of the wood Robert started to rattle the traces and to moan and groan for all he was worth. The pair stopped dead, Jimmy clutching on to James, who rocked on his heels like a mandarin.

Presently through the still night air came a frightened little pipe from Jimmy : "The Lord save us, did ye hear that, James ?" No answer from James, who continued to rock on his heels. Then Jimmy, still more alarmed at the silence : "Answer the question, James, or we're lost entirely." Robert whispered to me that the country people had an answer for the call of a ghost, and proceeded to rattle the chains and moan once more. But James still failed to weigh in with the answer. "Arrah, James man," wailed Jimmy, "answer the question for the love of God."

By this time the situation must have penetrated to James's poteen-logged brain, and he cried with a loud laugh : "Ah, to hell with the answer, Jimmy ; sure it's only a pigeon, or maybe some lad going home with a bellyful of drink." And away stalked James down the road and off home, followed by the shaking Jimmy, torn between the fear of being left alone with the ghost and the danger of passing the haunted wood without giving the answer.

The following day we shot the mountains, and though we did not see so many birds as on the bogs they lay better, and consequently we shot more. Also the going was better, and the absence of people and cur dogs a great relief. Towards noon the breeze died away and the heat became almost unbearable ; so, after making the highest ground we could find, we lay down in the heather, under the shade of a big rock, to wait for the cool of the

Foody's Kitchen.



late afternoon and pray for a breeze, while Robert took the setters to a small lake below for a swim.

Both Charles and I, though wearing hardly any clothes at all, were nearly boiled alive with the great heat, and could not understand why Paddy, clad in coat, waistcoat and trousers of the thickest homespun, like a suit of Japanese quilted armour, looked offensively cool.

For some time I saw Charles looking at Paddy's armour—it made me feel hotter than ever merely to look at it—and then wondering at his cool face. At last he asked him why he wore such thick clothes on such a hot day. "Well now," said Paddy, "if they'd keep out cold, why wouldn't they keep out heat?" An original theory, and one which worked well apparently in Paddy's case.

At lunch-time we were joined by a long, thin son of Jimmy's, a boy of about sixteen. Charles and I had lunch first, and then lay down in the heather to try and rest while the men ate their food. Suddenly we were startled by the roars of Jimmy. "Ye auld devil, Robert, ye have the lad choked. Oh, musha, what'll his mother say at all?" The boy, who appeared to have suddenly gone mad, was rushing round in circles, tearing with both hands at his mouth, with the grinning Robert at his heels. When near us the boy stopped, and we could see that he was purple in the face, and his mouth, which was stretched from ear to ear, stuffed with a solid lump of bully beef. But before we could go to his help Robert caught him, and with a large corkscrew proceeded to draw

out the beef in chunks until at last the boy's mouth was cleared, Jimmy standing by all the time wringing his hands and groaning.

It seemed that Robert, full of mischief as usual, had dared Jimmy's son, who probably had never eaten meat in his life before, to get the contents of a half-pound bully beef tin into his mouth without laying a tooth in it, and the boy, who must have had an extraordinary large mouth, did it, and then, of course, the trouble started. Once inside his mouth he could not lay a tooth on the beef, which would neither go down nor come out, and then he got scared badly.

Late in the afternoon, when we were nearly asphyxiated by the heat and had given up all hope, a heavenly breeze came in from the sea. Jimmy wanted us to go off to some infernal skelp, as bare as the top of his own head, but I declined; and, seeing a long valley covered with fine young heather, I led the way to it, feeling certain that all the grouse from the skelps would be feeding there in the cool of the evening. And for the next two hours we had good shooting, to the old man's great surprise.

Afterwards we had tea in Jimmy's house, which literally looked to be clinging to the side of the mountain, and one wondered why the winter storms had not blown it away long ago into the lake below.

Jimmy's farm was what Mr. Mulligan would describe in one of his sale advertisements as a large and desirable mountain farm: the mountain was very obvious, but the desirable farm was not.

There certainly were plenty of stone walls, but the greater part of the land they enclosed was only rock and heather.

However, he possessed two cows (the size and colour of Labrador retrievers), an ass, the inevitable brace of barking curs, a large flock of moth-eaten-looking hens, and, greater than all these, a perfectly contented mind. But then Jimmy belonged to a generation of Irish peasantry famous for their perfect manners, courtesy and conservatism, but now nearly extinct.

Mrs. Jimmy received us as though we were the only people in the whole world who really mattered, and then gave us an enormous tea of soda bread and endless relays of boiled eggs. Charles insisted on going into Jimmy's bedroom, a room full of German-made holy pictures and statues, and washing himself from head to foot in a tiny tin basin. Mrs. Jimmy thanked us for honouring her humble roof, and we dropped down the mountain side to the road by the lake, where a car from the lodge and our ponies were waiting, and we rode home in the cool of the evening.

That night the band was not in good form, probably they were feeling the effects of the hot day, with the exception of Paddy, who was full of chat ; and instead of music Paddy told us stories.

Most of Paddy's yarns were about the times he had spent on different Yorkshire farms, but he told us one amusing one about a leprechaun. Many years ago Paddy's grandparents were driving to the market-town, and old Paddy was walking

alongside the cart up a steep hill while his wife sat in the cart. Presently he spotted a lizard asleep in the grass at the side of the road, which he caught, and then did not know what to do with it. While he was hesitating the lizard, which was really a leprechaun in disguise, nearly frightened the wits out of Paddy by saying that if he would let it go he would be granted three wishes. And Paddy, who had a great veneration for fairies of all kinds, at once put the lizard down with great care in the grass, and hurried off to the town to test the virtue of the leprechaun's promise.

For the rest of the journey neither Paddy nor the wife spoke, both being fully occupied thinking of what their wishes were to be; and the old man was so absorbed that he even forgot to get into the cart at the top of the hill, and walked the whole way.

On reaching the town Paddy, who by now had a great thirst on him, left the cart with his wife in it outside an ironmonger's shop, and went off to a pub to quench his thirst before getting down to the serious business of the day, the gratifying of the three wishes.

Meanwhile Mrs. Paddy began to get bored sitting alone in the cart, forgot all about the leprechaun's promise, and began to look around her. Presently her eye caught the grandest looking tin bowl in the ironmonger's window, the very kind of bowl her soul had longed for all her life. Before she had finished wishing the bowl was in the cart at her feet. The old woman was greatly startled and

afeard, but the fear soon died away in the joy at the possession of such a wonderful bowl, and all for nothing. But unfortunately the shopkeeper came out, saw his bowl in the cart with Mrs. Paddy, and promptly accused her of stealing it. At this point Paddy returned from the pub, to find the shopkeeper talking about the police.

Terrible work followed. The shopkeeper swore, Mrs. Paddy burst into tears, and Paddy, losing his temper, prayed that the bowl might fly inside the old woman. And at the second wish the bowl promptly flew inside Mrs. Paddy. In the end it took the third and last wish to retrieve the bowl and appease the astonished shopkeeper, and the old couple had to return home with divil a thing to show for their three wishes.

XI

WE spent a fortnight at the shooting-lodge, and shot every day except Sundays, when we used to fish the mountain lakes for brown trout. One lake, which the master had stocked several years previously with trout, was supposed to hold fish of a fabulous size, but, though we tried it hard, we could do no good. However, the trout were there, as Paddy's son brought a fine one of seven and a half pounds to the lodge one evening, caught with a sally-rod and a piece of string.

We did better on the mountains than on the bogs ; not because the former held more birds, but because the cover was better, and the birds less disturbed. But there was not sufficient heather anywhere to carry a big head of grouse ; and, moreover, we saw a lot of vermin—badgers, foxes, peregrines, and that pest of the West of Ireland, the grey crow.

The red setters were splendid ; and without such hardy and fast dogs we would probably have got very few grouse. Never once did they show any sign of being fed up, though at times they felt the heat badly when they could not find water to swim in. But their finest trait was their keenness : sometimes for a whole hour they would fail to get

a set, but it did not make the slightest difference, and they would continue to range as wide and fast as ever. A wonderfully fine breed of dogs. Gentle, loving, and sport-loving to the highest degree : the cleanest-bred-looking dog in the world, and a perfect gentleman in the true sense of the word.

Charles nearly caused a riot one very hot day by appearing on the bogs in white flannel shorts. No sooner had we started to shoot than every man and boy within sight dropped spade or turf “*loy*,” left horse or ass cart, and collected together on any high ground to watch the mad English gentleman who went out shooting in his drawers. Women stood at their doors, while their daughters peeped over their shoulders, giggling, and I heard one old dame remark that “The man must be cracked and have no shame at all.” Charles stalked on, head in air, pretending not to notice the excitement his unusual get-up was causing ; while Robert and Jimmy slunk well behind with hanging heads and trying hard to pretend that they had nothing to do with the party. Gradually a crowd began to follow us ; and at last Charles remarked that he thought it was too hot to shoot and that we might as well go home.

Towards the end of our stay Paddy must have found out about Jimmy’s and James’s encounter with the ghost in the wood, and never gave them any peace. And before we left Robert determined to see how Paddy would stand up to one.

Paddy’s way home lay at the back of the lodge, up the so-called drive, and then along a track

across the face of the mountain to his house, about a mile and a half away.

Two nights before we were to leave Robert disappeared some time before the usual musical party broke up. And Paddy, after asking Jimmy if he should see him past the woodeen, set off for home, his heart uplifted with poteen. Presently Robert returned and told us how he had waited with the chains in some bushes at the back gate. And of how at the first rattle Paddy had stood crossing himself, being afraid to go on or to turn his back on the ghost. But when he heard the second rattle, backed up by Robert's best groans, he had let one screech out of him like a hunted hare, and then away with him up the mountain like the hammers of hell, "And," said Robert, "if ye'll come out quick ye can still hear his feet striking agin the rocks."

The following day Paddy turned up as usual, and after we had started to make our way up the mountain I heard Robert ask him if he had met any ghosts going home. "What makes ye think that?" queried Paddy, with a suspicious look.

"Well now," replied Robert with a child-like expression, "I thought I heard ye let out a cross shout as though maybe ye were hunting some devil." For some minutes Paddy made no answer, but I could see him watching Robert carefully out of the corner of his eye; and when at last he came to the conclusion that he was not having his leg pulled, he told us what had happened to him.

When he got near the back gate didn't he see a

figure standing outside barring his road home. "Who are ye?" said Paddy three times, and getting no answer he rushed at the figure, shouting "I'll teach ye to give a decent man a civil answer," and with that the figure turned and ran up the mountain in the moonlight, and divil a sound out of his feet at all.

Paddy was for leaving it at that, but not so Robert, who inquired in an admiring tone, "And what did ye do then?" After scratching his head well for further inspiration, Paddy at last burst out in his fiercest voice, "Didn't I grip me stick tight and up and after it. And twice I came up and aimed the father and mother of pucks at it, and didn't me stick go clean through and strike the ground."

Once more Paddy came to the end of his imagination and resorted to head-scratching, but Robert coaxed him to tell us how at last a cloud came over the moon and with that the ghost legged it down a rabbit-hole. "And what did you do then?" we all asked, wondering if he could still carry on; but Paddy was getting suspicious and would only add that he went home, of course.

Meanwhile Paddy's wife had been down to the lodge to see Mrs. Devine, from whom Robert extracted Paddy's overnight version of the ghost hunt: very different to the one we had heard in broad daylight.

Some time after she had gone to bed Mrs. Paddy was awakened by a terrible hammering at the door and fearful yells from Paddy, and on rushing into

the kitchen she found her husband lying in the doorway, half in and half out. "What's on ye Paddy agra ?" cried the wife, thinking that the poor fellow was dying. Paddy gave a last groan and whispered, "Mary, help me for the love of God. The devil has me by the hind leg, and only I had the grace o' God on me the auld thief had me choked." And when Mary had dragged him inside and shut and bolted the door, Paddy told her what really had happened. He was walking home quiet and easy like and never thinking of anything wrong at all, when suddenly at the back gate a terrible black divil, and him all covered with rattling chains, sprang out of the bushes and made one drive at Paddy, with a scream of, "I have ye." "And what did ye do, Paddy darlin'," asked the wife. "Do," groaned Paddy, "why I ran like a hare the whole way home, and Mary, it was awful. Couldn't I hear the divil's feet padding behind me and his chains banging, and betimes I could smell the dead breath of him, and when he coughed I thought the blast of it would burn me."

The day we left, Jimmy and Paddy drove the ass convoy with our kit to the point where the cart from home was to meet them : while Charles and I rode and shot by turns. Robert knew every inch of the country, and I am sure was not above poaching any good ground we passed.

We never saw Paddy again : but during a spell of fine weather in October Mary insisted on being taken in the car to see Jimmy, who received her most graciously, but was greatly taken aback when

Mary refused sternly a large mug of poteen. I think that Paddy, James and Jimmy spent most of the winter running stills in the mountains.

Some years afterwards I was motoring past the lake below Jimmy's house with my wife : leaving the car on the road, we climbed up the mountain to see if the old man was still alive. Jimmy saw us coming and came to meet us. When I introduced my wife to him, the old man looked at each of us in turn with a solemn face, and then slowly a child-like smile spread over his face. "Ah ha !" said he, "Jimmy's not so auld as all that. Sure this isn't the wife ye had with ye the last time." And nothing we could say would induce him to believe that we were not pulling his leg.

After we got home that evening, Charles heard loud screams from Maria in the pantry, and found her with a death's head moth fluttering round her head : while Porseen, grinning with delight, kept telling her that the crayture was after mistaking her head for the lamp, or maybe for the kitchen fire. Charles told Porseen to shut the window quickly and to get him a net ; and he ambled off, muttering that it was a queer thing to make such a fuss over a dirty auld bat, but returned presently with a huge salmon landing net he had found in the smoking-room.

Charles caught and set up the moth without doing it any damage, a fine specimen with the skull and cross-bones very plainly marked. Some days afterwards Mr. Mulligan, who had come out from Eastport, admired the death's head so much that Charles

made him a present of it. We heard afterwards that Mrs. Mulligan died a few days after the moth was brought into her home, and that the unfortunate husband attributed her death to his bringing home such an unlucky thing.

After we returned Robert was constantly at us to go out fishing, but it is poor sport during September and October to a man who is used to spring fishing. He coaxed me out once and I caught a large, emaciated salmon, of a horrible red and yellow, which played no better than a kelt. And when Robert had the fish on the bank, and was on the point of giving it a tip on the head with the "priest," I thought of the grand twenty-pounder Charles had caught in the spring, with its wonderful sheen of silver and opal, and told Robert, to his great disgust, to put my miserable red and yellow parody of a spring fish back into the river.

At that time of the year, no matter how recently they have come up from the sea, salmon and sea-trout are heavy with the cares of family affairs and give no play worth talking about ; nor are they good to eat. Moreover, it is a pity to kill them then when one remembers the difference every pair of fish on the spawning beds may make to the fishing in a few years' time. But it is hard enough to get an Irish peasant to think of the present, let alone the future : and to spare a fish in order that some other angler might catch its children in five years' time did not appeal to Robert's idea of sanity.

After one small flood Robert reported that a lot of large sea-trout had come into the Glenowen river,

and for two days we had good fishing, many of the trout being over two pounds and up to three or four, but it was not the right thing, and we determined to give up salmon and trout fishing for the season.

We now found ourselves with two or three weeks to put in before the snipe arrived.

Several times we tried to get out to sea in the motor-boat, only to find, on reaching the mouth of the bay, that the bar was, as Robert described it, "in flames," and quite impossible to cross.

When dapping on Lough Rusky in June we had heard wonderful stories of the size and number of the pike there, and being now rather at a loose end, thought we would go there for a week and try if we could catch a pike as big as a shark.

Mary was by now completely taken up with the garden, and spent a good deal of her time endeavouring to eradicate superstition from the methods of John, the head gardener. I remember hearing one great argument between them. Mary wished to have some young cabbages planted at once. John was quite willing, but said that he must wait a few days ; his theory being that cabbages planted during a waxing moon would never grow, but that as soon as the moon was on the wane he would plant as many as she liked.

There is no doubt that autumn is the time of year to see the wild parts of the west of Ireland at their best : by that time the colours of mountain and bog have ripened to a deeper and richer tone. As we drove to Pat's hotel on Lough

Rusky on a clear, still autumn morning, every mountain was a different colour: some a vivid green, with here and there great patches of russet brown dead bracken; others, their lower slopes covered with acres and acres of sedge grass, yellow blending to orange, and higher up scars of greyish rock, with patches of ivy growing over them. And every bog covered with a rich red and yellow carpet, divided in places by dark brown turf banks.

Several times we disturbed small packs of grouse, busy dusting themselves in the sandy edges of the road, and passed whole families spending their day in the bogs, getting in their winter supply of turf; the children, bare-footed and in short, red flannel petticoats, bringing the turf in ass-creels to the roadside, which their elders then took home in carts.

It was a perfectly still, windless day, with a clear blue sky, so still that the blue smoke from the cottages went straight up. Lough Rusky lay like a great sheet of glass, with perfect reflections of rocks, trees and heather along its shores. The woods of oak and hazel along the south-west shore, gorgeous in their brilliant autumn tints, were backed by the deep purple and green spurs of the mountain, and beyond them again the mountains themselves of a misty blue.

We found the hotel empty, and received a warm welcome from Pat, who was full of the usual stories of wonderful sport past and to come; like so many of his kind, always ignoring the present and dwelling on the past and future.

We settled only to have one boatman, and that Charles and I would take it in turn to row with him. There are few more miserable sights in cold weather than pike fishermen, huddled up in the stern of a boat, hidden by rugs, ulsters and capes, with only a cold red nose showing, and their feet and legs encased in hot-water bottles.

That night there was a light frost, and we set out after breakfast with Terry Walsh in a thick mist, which lifted before we had rowed a mile on our way to a bay which was reputed to hold monster pike from now on, until they moved into the shallow reed beds in March to spawn.

We found that it was impossible to troll the greater part of the bay, owing to large weed beds, and decided to try spinning from the boat. Charles was anxious to try a large red and silver Canadian spoon, being a great believer in red baits for pike. And Terry told us a great yarn about how some years ago a countrywoman brought a great roll of red flannel, which her husband had just woven, to this very bay, and left it in shallow water to wash. After some hours she returned to see a pike as big as a young whale slowly swimming away, having eaten half the roll of red flannel, and making determined efforts to get down the remainder. "A great fellow altogether," concluded Terry, "and may we meet him to-day."

I then asked what he recommended me to try, and for answer he produced a mysterious-looking box from under the seat, and passed it to me, saying: "Try one of them fellows, yer honour,

them's great for pikes." And on opening the box I found that it was full of live yellow frogs of all sizes. Terry wanted me to stick a large single hook through an unfortunate frog, but I refused, telling him that if we couldn't catch pike without crucifying frogs we wouldn't catch them at all, and put up a "wagtail."

Charles missed two fish through not striking hard enough, but made no mistake with the third, and had a good fight with a twenty-eight pound pike. Twice the fish all but got into the weeds, and once it came out of the water shaking its head so vigorously that one could hear the metal spoon clicking against its wicked rows of teeth like castanets. We got one other pike spinning, and two more trolling; largest eighteen pounds and smallest ten. But during the afternoon the weather started to change rapidly, and by the time we landed it was blowing hard from the west.

After dinner Pat came into the sitting-room to talk sport and drink whisky. Recently there had been an election of the local Board of Guardians, and some of the new members did not meet with Pat's approval, who, whatever his morals might have been, possessed the traditional good manners of his country. With scorn he read out to us from the local paper the following "back-chat" between two of the new guardians at their last meeting.
Mr. Mike Moloney (addressing the chairman): "Ye dirty little cockle-picker." (Laughter.)
Chairman: "Who robbed the poor old tinker

from Eastport?" *Mr. Moloney*: "Was it me?" *Chairman*: "It was." (Uproar.) And Pat told us that an eye-witness had told him that Moloney and the chairman got into holts and rolled on the floor in their rage. "Nice goings on for the representatives of the people," snorted Pat.

That night it blew a gale from the west which rocked the hotel to its very foundations, and the following day we could not start fishing before the afternoon, and even then it was all we could do to pull against the wind.

The contrast to the day before was extraordinary. Not a vestige of the mountains could be seen, nor yet even the woods along the south-west shore; all being hidden by a pall of heavy grey mist, while the lake was a dirty grey, only relieved by the white tops of the short waves. However, after lunch the clouds lifted, a faint, translucent light shone through their lower edges, lighting up the lowest spurs of the mountains and the woods with a soft, golden light, and the wind took off a little.

Charles hooked a very big fish soon after we had started, which we never saw, but which kept his rod in a hoop for over twenty minutes before the bait came away. And to this day Charles often wonders what size the fish really was.

After we had been out about two hours the clouds came down once more, the wind increased, and we were only just able to get back to the hotel.

We waited for two days, hoping that the

weather might take up again, but on the third day, as it was still impossible to get out on the lake, we made for home.

We were sorry in a way to put by our rods, but glad to handle a gun once again. Often when fishing on the Glenowen river in the summer-time we had surprised clutches of young wild duck : grand little balls of black and yellow fluff, which dived as one bird at our sudden appearance on the bank, to be seen no more, though the presence of the mother swimming stealthily through a patch of reeds with her head nearly level with the water told us where the rendezvous had been. And it occurred to us that by now these small duck ought to be good-sized flappers, and I suggested to Robert that we ought to try for them in the bogs ; but Robert had a better plan.

If you stood in the valley of the Glenowen river small golden yellow patches at once caught your eye, dotted about on the higher ground, and showing up plainly against a background of green and brown : the mountainy farmers' tiny cornfields. By now all these fields had been cut, laboriously with reaping-hooks, and the corn gathered into stooks. And here every evening at dusk all the duck in the county used to collect and feast on the oats.

But there were so many of these little corn-fields scattered about on the lower slopes of the surrounding mountains that it would have been impossible to know which to go for but for Robert's knowledge. And Robert hardly ever made a

mistake ; basing his judgment on the direction of the wind and the state of the weather.

On wild, stormy evenings, when, as Robert used to quaintly tell us, " it would get late early," the duck would flight early, and drop straight into the first cornfield which came handy. During a bad storm they would even start in broad daylight, but on fine evenings they would flight late—the finer the evening the later the flight. And on calm, clear evenings they might not come in until the moon was up.

On fine evenings the duck were in no hurry to get down to their supper, and we could hear the rush of their wings overhead, and often the low quack of command from some old mallard, as they wheeled about in the sky searching out pet corn-fields. And even when they had found the field they wanted they would circle round it several times, which in the bad light was often their undoing, as it gave us a chance of getting them against the sky : whereas once they had pitched it used to be almost impossible to see them before they had risen high enough to show against the sky again, when they would be out of shot.

Trying to conceal oneself inside a stool was useless and unnecessary. All one had to do was to wear light clothes and cap, sit on a game bag on the ground, using a stool to support one's back, and keep perfectly still : even when it was quite light duck would then fly into your face. But any movement, especially of the face, as looking upwards or turning one's head, was fatal.

The first evening we went out after duck Mary insisted on coming and bringing Dash. Charles told her that the ground would be soaking wet, but the result was that he had to carry an air-cushion for Mary and a waterproof rug for the dog. However, the wily Robert took us to a field which was seldom frequented by duck, and so we frightened very few.

First came a single mallard, quacking loudly for company or in hope of attracting it, and at once Dash got busy, whining and jumping up in the air. The mallard promptly shot up into the sky well out of shot, and went off in search of another field. Luckily a heavy ground mist came on early, which cured Mary of any desire to go duck-flighting again.

The following evening was wild with low scudding clouds from the west, and the promise of wind and rain to come, and Robert took us at an early hour to a field on top of a hog-backed spur, which ran down into the Glenowen valley.

Hardly had we taken up our positions when the duck started to come in, and for twenty minutes, while the flight lasted, we had the time of our lives. The duck knew well what was coming, and were in a mighty hurry to fill up with oats before the storm and darkness set in : they wasted no time circling round the field, but flew straight in, at times too low. We found it easy enough, while the light was fairly good, to bring down a bird with the first barrel ; it was the second bird that beat us time and again. At the first shot a flock would throw

themselves backward and upwards simultaneously, and curl away at express speed, and no matter how one aimed the betting was on the second bird getting away.

Charles shot a right and left of teal, but probably they were on their way to feed in some marsh or flash, and only crossed us by chance.

It is a fascinating form of shooting. First you hear a very faint suspicion of a quack from somewhere in the sky, and wonder if it is for you. Then, when you have given up all hope, the swish of their wings, seemingly on top of you: at the same instant you catch a glimpse of the birds, black against the sky, and there is no mistaking the peculiar silhouette of a wild duck going all out: then the quick right and left, followed by an outburst of terrific quacking and the rush of upward beating wings, and they are gone; and you settle down to wait for the next lot. And on a wild evening there is little waiting, often only just time to reload, pick up your birds and get into position.

By this time it was too dark to see a duck at all. We had picked up twenty-four duck and two teal, while there were four runners yet to be gathered by Robert's retriever. The dog found three, and then the storm burst, and before we were off the ridge we were soaked to the skin. But twenty-seven wild duck and two teal laid out in rows on the smoking-room table, and the thought of a hot bath, made up for more than a wet skin.

On the last day of September Robert arrived in a state of wild excitement at the smoking-room

window after breakfast, and called out : "They've landed." On asking for a few details we found that by they he meant the wild geese, which he had seen soon after dawn that morning flying across the demesne.

From that time on, practically every day throughout the winter we used to see huge gaggles of geese, generally in a V formation, flying across the park or even over the house. In the early morning after a dark night they would leave the bogs where they had been resting during the night and fly up to the meadows along the banks of the Glenowen river to feed, returning to the bogs in the late afternoon. But when there was a good moon they generally used to flight directly it was up.

On a fine winter's afternoon there were few finer sights in that wild land than a great gaggle of white-fronted geese winging their way to the bogs to the accompaniment of much cackling.

XII

WHILE we were away grouse-shooting Mary had unearthed two more servants: two old women, by name Eliza and Sarah, who at one time had been nurses and then maids to the family, and when past work had simply remained on living in the house.

Mary discovered them by chance living in an out-of-the-way wing with a colony of cats. They told her that they did odd jobs like mending linen, filling hot-water bottles, darning socks, and in summer-time weeding in the garden; but when Mary suggested that some fresh air might do them good they hastily added that they were long past stooping.

After Mary had made the acquaintance of these old ladies we seemed to meet one or both every day; possibly we had met them about the house previously, but had confused them with the other maids.

Eliza quickly developed a habit of stopping to talk whenever I met her on the landing outside my bedroom, and was always full of the cats, which had been left in her special charge. At different times I must have heard the pedigrees, histories, virtues and vices of every cat which had

ever been an inmate of "Rackrent Hall"; but can only remember her description of one called "Mary," which Rogan, the breadman, had brought as a small kitten from Eastport. "And," said Eliza, "it's a sin to be calling the cat by that holy name, and she a dirty old he-cat."

Eliza was peculiarly ugly, and rather gloried in the fact. Several times she described graphically and with minute details the scene at her father's death-bed above in Dublin for my special benefit. And she would always wind up with: "The last words he ever said to me, the poor dear fellow, as he looked up from the bed and saw me standing beside him, crying, were: 'G'long out of that, ye pug-nosed thing.'"

Sarah was not nearly so much in evidence as Eliza, and would generally confide her troubles and woes to Mary, who passed them on to Charles and me in the smoking-room during the winter evenings.

Sarah's one and only love affair, though probably typical of her kind, rudely shattered the romance which Mary was endeavouring to build up round this old peasant woman. According to Sarah's showing she was extremely pretty when she was a girl, and much sought after by the young men of the mountains, and even from across the bay.

When she was about twenty her parents left her alone at home one day while they drove into the market at Eastport. Before they returned a neighbour, on her way home from the town, looked in to see Sarah. "And do ye know, asthore, whose

match they're after making in town this day ? ” she asked her.

“ Sure and I don’t,” replied Sarah.

“ Whose but yer own,” laughed the old woman.

“ The Lord save us, and who is it I’m to marry ? ” cried Sarah.

“ John McKenna from beyont the bay.”

“ Musha, musha ! ” wailed Sarah, “ and him the one boy in the whole barony I can’t abide. What’ll I do at all ? ”

But she married him all right, and appeared to have lived happily with him until he came to an untimely end in a bog-hole, when driving home dead drunk one dark winter’s night from Eastport.

The end of September and the first few days of October were wet and wild, and we were confined to the house most of the time ; but after that the weather gradually improved, and by the time the first big flight of snipe came in with the moon it was perfect.

The previous winter’s snipe-shooting had made us keener than ever for more of that fascinating, if selfish, sport ; and if we were keen Robert was keener. Not only had he studied the habits of snipe, in fact, of all wild birds, from boyhood, but he always seemed to know by some uncanny instinct where snipe were to be found under all conditions of weather, and at all times of the season.

The majority of countrymen in the west of Ireland are apt to think that because they find a certain bog stiff with snipe one day that it must

always be a grand place for them. And even though they may go to the same bog afterwards, time after time, and find it empty of snipe, they will never think of the reason, but merely express great surprise and say that they can't understand it.

Robert had mapped out the estate into different snipe-beats ; each one called by the name of some townland on it, and only to be shot under certain conditions of weather and moon.

Robert's idea was that the best time to shoot snipe in the West was from the first of October on to Christmas ; when, he said, after the first big storm, most of the snipe left and went down to Kerry and Cork, and stayed there until towards the end of February, when they would reappear for a short time in the West on their way to the breeding grounds in Scandinavia. And of this time the pick was the month of October ; when you not only get the home-bred birds before they migrate, but also the foreigners coming in practically every day. And at that time there is plenty of cover to make the birds lie well, scent is good, and the weather usually fine. And so keen was he on this theory that, after he had seen a lot of birds on a certain beat, he would insist on our shooting there the following day or two days afterwards ; arguing that the birds we disturbed would not leave the beat until the weather conditions altered, or there was a change in the moon, also that fresh birds were coming in every night and would be certain to pitch on the same ground. And on several

occasions we proved that Robert was right: even getting bigger bags on the second day.

There was only one point on which we could not agree with Robert, and that was shooting on Sunday, and as long as we stayed at "Rackrent Hall" he never gave up trying to coax us to break the Sabbath, arguing that, if it was right to fish on that day, it was surely right to shoot.

After a calm, moonlight night and a hasty breakfast by lamplight, we prepared to set out for our first day's real snipe shooting. We found Robert waiting for us in the pantry with a brace of eager red setters, and as soon as we were ready we set to work to try and get everybody and everything into Lizzie. Patsey, holding a guttering candle above his head, took charge, shouting out his usual wild orders to Maria and Porgeen. And as ever, Maria, red of hair, face and hands, did all the work, while Porgeen, looking as green as grass in the sharp autumn morning, trotted aimlessly from the pantry window, out of which our kit was shot in an avalanche, to the car and back again, muttering all the time: "Take yer time now, no hurry." He reminded me of Dash frolicking around Mary when both were slightly excited.

Patsey's method of packing Lizzie consisted of first pushing Robert into the back of the car, then throwing in a large bundle of straw, into which he heaved the setters, and finally firing in gun-cases, game-bags, cartridge-bags, suit-cases with our change of clothes, and lunch-bag as fast as he could on top of Robert and the setters, to the

accompaniment of a volley of curses from Robert and yowls from the unfortunate dogs, trying to make nests for themselves in the straw at the bottom of the car.

Charles then started up Lizzie, switched on the lights, he and I got into the front seats, and we pulled out of the yard in the semi-darkness, followed by cheers and hurries from Patsey and his underlings.

On this morning Lizzie started directly she was asked to, but afterwards on cold winter mornings it used to take fully a dozen people to get a move on her. Charles would first twist the handle until he was black in the face; this he obstinately insisted on doing always, in spite of our telling him that it was quite useless. Then he would give the order of all hands to the kettles to the waiting Patsey. Off would dash Patsey into the house, and in a few seconds we would hear the screams of kitchen and house maids, being pulled out of bed by Patsey and ordered to boil every kettle in the house, sound or leaking, at once.

Presently a procession of half-dressed maids, led by Patsey, and with Porgeen gibbering in the rear, would appear in the yard, each carrying a steaming kettle, which would be emptied into Lizzie's radiator.

Generally the application of boiling water and having her back axle jacked up would do the trick; but after one bad morning, when nothing would induce her even to think of starting, and we had to stay at home, Charles converted an old

shed on the avenue into a garage. Lizzie used then to be pushed out on to the avenue, Charles would take the wheel, and we would start her down the terrific hill to the front of the house, and by the time she had reached the bottom she was nearly always going strong.

Soon after we started the first signs of the coming dawn began to appear in the sky. Our road lay due east, and gradually behind the mountains ahead it began to turn from dark blue to pale lemon, and then to a soft pink. And as the sun rose the whole wide panorama of mountains, moors and bogs was bathed in rose pink for a few minutes, giving an indescribable appearance of warmth to the whole landscape. But if it was cold before, it was twice as cold for about a quarter of an hour after the sun had risen, before the day was thoroughly aired.

For miles we did not meet or see a human being, nor was there a sign of life in any of the scattered cottages we passed, except one unhappy-looking dog crouching against the door of its home.

With daylight and a clear road Charles pushed Lizzie along at a good rate, and we were not long in leaving the mountains, to drop down a steep hill into a large valley below, which was to be our beat for the day. In the middle of this valley ran a river, fed by numerous mountain streams, and along the banks of these streams many small fields, some rushy, and all with plenty of cover.

Robert directed us to the keeper's house, about a mile from the bottom of the hill, and we arrived to

find the Foody family all making their toilet and eating their breakfast at the same time in the kitchen. Antony Foody opened the door for us, and at once an endless string of children of all ages and sizes poured out ; so many were there that Charles insisted that they came out at the front door, went in at the back and out again. Afterwards we often asked Mrs. Foody how many children she had. Antony had not the remotest idea, and owned that he had lost count long ago, and she always told us she wasn't rightly sure, the house was that thronged with them. Whereupon Charles would ask her why she didn't count them at night when they had gone to bed, and the good woman would answer with a laugh that they were that through other ye couldn't say whether there was a dozen or a score.

We started shooting along a stream close to the Foodys' house, and had not gone a hundred yards before Rake, one of the setters, came to a stiff set. Robert walked in the middle and Charles and I about thirty yards from him on either side : while Antony and his eldest son Pat, covered with game and cartridge bags, the former leading the other setter and the latter carrying a mysterious coil of light rope, brought up the rear. Too many people, Robert complained, and ordered the Foodys to keep well behind, and forbade them under the direst penalties to talk or make the slightest noise.

The usually talkative Robert was as silent as a sphinx, working his setters by hand and very rarely whistling ; in fact, he appeared able to make

himself half his usual size, and to creep about noiselessly. Even the setters had been trained to go through water without splashing ; and when in doubt as to which way they were to go next they would watch Robert until he showed them, by a wave of his hand, the required direction. In fact, keeper and setters worked like a piece of silent and well-oiled machinery. In the small fields he worked only one setter at a time, but when we came to an open bog or big stretch of semi-mountain land he would make the pair range wide and fast.

It would have been hard to find fault with the day. There was a good clear light with high clouds and no glare ; so that snipe showed up distinctly against the background of greeny-yellow grass, the same colour as Nature has given to the birds, and which makes them so hard to see and shoot in a bad light. The westerly wind was just strong enough to deaden sound and make the birds lie well, with that soft feeling peculiar to the West of Ireland, and which means always a good scent.

After the recent heavy rains most of the land in the vicinity of the streams had been flooded, and now that the water had run off the ground was just wet enough to suit snipe, and with the prospect of a good feeding night ahead of them the majority of the birds lay until we were within twenty yards of them. Some lay so close in the thick cover of the long grass that Rake would give up his set, thinking the bird had gone ; but Robert would not leave the spot until he had put the snipe up, which would often give the hardest shot of all as it nearly

twisted itself inside out in its hurry to get clear of men and dogs. Sometimes one which we had passed lost its life through crying out when it rose behind us.

The mystery of the rope was solved when we came to a small but very wet-looking marsh, with patches of tall reeds growing in the middle, the rest horrible-looking black mud. Tying up the setters when we were within a hundred yards of the place, Robert posted us silently up wind, and then, with Antony's help, proceeded to drag the rope quietly across the marsh towards us.

For the first few yards nothing happened : then the rope must have nearly touched a snipe, which rose with a cry of fright and surprise, to be downed by Charles. At the report six teal rose from a patch of reeds in the middle, and on seeing us turned outwards, giving fine crossing shots : Charles took one with his remaining barrel, and I could not help getting a right and left.

Robert and Antony had halted at the first shot, but in spite of this several snipe took the opportunity to make themselves scarce while we were reloading. The rope then started to advance again, and by the time the men reached us we had shot four more snipe and a mallard, which lay within a few yards of where we were standing until the rope was within a few inches of it.

When snipe are plentiful and lying well time flies quickly, and it seemed as though we could not have been shooting more than an hour when Robert gave the word for lunch. But it was

The Bay in Winter.



half-past one, and as we had been shooting away from Foody's house all the morning, even if we turned directly we had had lunch, it would be dark before we could get back there.

We had twenty brace of snipe by lunch-time ; and one could not help thinking that one of the great charms of good snipe shooting is that you get all the shooting. Very different to most covert shoots, where there may be half a dozen guns, and probably two of them get most of the shooting.

In addition to snipe we had grouse, mallard, teal, two hares and several green plover ; another charm is never knowing what you may meet with next.

But though snipe-shooting is a pleasant sport it is not an easy one, and many factors go to make success. To know where to look for birds. To possess good setters, and even if you do not train them yourself they must always be kept well-disciplined and never allowed to lapse into bad habits, such as running shot or going where they want to instead of where you want. Knowing the right positions to take up under different conditions when a dog is on a set. Also you must be fit and keep so, as it is a sport which demands great endurance from man and dog.

And if you will only use your brains when out snipe shooting you will learn something new every day, no matter how long you have been at it : because snipe never fly the same two days running, and think nothing of being in an uncut bog when

by all the rules of the game they ought to be in a rushy field.

After lunch we could not find many snipe, though we picked up odd grouse, curlew and some golden plover. And once we found a covey of partridges in a small potato field only a few yards from a cottage ; both of us getting an easy right and left —the only partridges we saw during a long day, though Robert told us that when he was a boy they were plentiful in this valley.

As the light began to go we got into the snipe once more in some small bogs not far from Foody's house ; but by now they were beginning to think about their coming dinner, and were not inclined to wait for us.

Coming to the last bog Robert announced that we had fifty-seven snipe, and that we must get three more to make up the thirty brace : but a wild snipe in a bad light is a hard bird to bring down, and to Robert's disgust we missed them steadily.

But Robert was determined that we should make up the thirty brace, and in the growing darkness led us to a spot which he said always held snipe every day of the winter. Sure enough the place held several snipe : we could hear them, even if we could not see them. I missed with both barrels, but Charles made great shooting. With his right barrel he brought down a bird and at the same time plastered an inquisitive bullock, which dashed off into the darkness bellowing. But with his left barrel he was even more successful, grassing a second snipe to bring the total to fifty-nine, and

also peppering Pat Foody, who had been sitting behind a bank in the line of fire and at the first shots had popped his head over the bank to see what happened. And Pat roared louder than the bullock, while his father and Robert cheered Charles to the echo.

Robert was still eager to secure the sixtieth snipe, and, after telling the boy that there was nothing on him and to go home, tried to coax us to another spot. But Charles, though elated at his great right and left in the semi-darkness, was beginning to wonder what the price of a bullock and a boy might be, and had had enough. By now it was quite dark, and we made for the cottage, guided by the howls of Pat.

The next time we went to the Foodys' Charles inquired after his victim. "Oh," said Mrs. Foody, "he's grand. Sure I was picking the shots out of him all that evening with a knitting-pin, and indeed he made a big noise about it." But if Pat was grand he was ever afterwards gun-shy; and at the sight of Charles getting out of Lizzie would disappear through the back door, to be seen no more until he heard the car leave his home.

When we reached the cottage we found the setters there before us, sitting up in front of the kitchen fire like two huge red cats: and when one side was dry they would turn the other to the fire.

We changed and had tea in the best room, a mixture of parlour and bedroom, with Foody clothes of both sexes and all sizes and kinds hanging on pegs and pictures and thrown over chairs.

The long drive home through the soft October night and the feeling of comfort at being once more in dry clean clothes were not the least of the day's pleasures. And one's thoughts were busy going over the day's sport: regrets at missed opportunities and satisfaction at the thought of the fine mixed bag in the back of the car, though the sixtieth snipe was missing.

Soon after we had started Robert asked if we had noticed the great get-up of the eldest Foody girl, who was going to a dance that evening. And when we said that we had not he laughed, saying: "It's a pity ye missed her with her triangle neck, and a biteen of skirt and the white cuffs on her ankles. And wasn't she carrying the time of day on a pieceen of a bridle-strap on her wrist. Sure her mother's hins must be laying two eggs a day to kape up such style."

When we reached home the setters were sound asleep, curled up close to each other in the straw. And after a good feed in front of the smoking-room fire, to the great disgust of the useless Dash, they trotted off to the kennels with Robert to a well-deserved rest.

XIII

THE first bad storm, towards the end of September, had driven most of the golden plover off the high moorlands, where they had spent the summer months rearing their families, to the shelter of the Glenowen river valley. Here they packed into great "stands," some of which must have been nearly a thousand strong.

Soon after their arrival we made an expedition to the river valley one afternoon with Robert, who promised to show us how simple the birds were during this season of the year.

After spotting a huge "stand" resting in a hollow, and packed so close that the birds appeared to be touching each other, Robert made us turn up our coat collars, pull our caps over our eyes, hunch up our shoulders, and, with our guns under our arms, walk slowly after him in single file round and round the "stand." After we started Robert ordered us in a hoarse whisper on no account to look at the plover, or even to let on that we knew they were there.

At the beginning of this weird form of stalking I heard Charles, who was behind me, sniff superciliously, but when, after making countless but ever narrowing circles, Robert got us nearly within shot,

I could hear Charles breathing hard with excitement.

At first the plover took no notice of us, but when we drew fairly close to them they began to show every sign of curiosity. Probably they thought us quite mad and harmless at first ; the young birds had never seen a gun before, and the older ones must have forgotten the look of one in the peace and quiet of the moorlands.

But after a time it must have occurred to them that there was something wrong somewhere. Here were three men who for some time had appeared to be walking away from them, and who should have been growing steadily smaller and smaller in size, but instead were growing larger and larger.

Out of the corner of my eye I could see the plover now watching us intently with their eyes, which were exactly like large and very bright black boot-buttons.

When we had started every bird was facing up wind, but as our circle began to get smaller every bird moved round in unison with us, so that they could the better follow the antics of these mad men. Round and round we went and the plover with us, and I could even see them pivoting on their feet.

When we were almost within shot they began to mark time, while here and there an odd bird would spread its wings and rise a few inches off the ground but only in a half-hearted sort of way, and when the others did not respond it would close its wings and subside on the ground.

It became acute agony watching them and wondering if they would stick it long enough to let us get within shot. And at last one bird, probably an old cock, rose with an uneasy cry of warning, and in a flash the whole "stand" rose with a rush of wings.

But by now we were well within shot, and our four barrels cut regular lanes through the close-packed ranks of the "stand."

Robert then ordered us to lie down, and, imitating the cry of a golden plover in distress to perfection, drew the birds over our heads. At the first shot the whole "stand" dived straight at us to within a few feet of the ground, but at such a pace and so unexpectedly that we missed them clean with our second barrels.

The "stand" now split up into small lots, and for the next twenty minutes we had great shooting at these small flocks and, best of all, at single birds, which could not resist Robert's plaintive whistling, and would often fly within a few yards of us, but at a tremendous speed. If only golden plover would always fly singly they would give as difficult and sporting shots as any man could desire. "Browning" a "stand" always seems like murdering the birds, but it is the only way to make a bag.

We tried this method of stalking several times again, but without the same success.

Up to the middle of November the weather was fair, middling and bad by turns; but after that we struck a maddening period of wet days and fine nights.

First came what the country people called a "fox of a day"—a day of glorious sunshine with a soft, balmy breeze, when the sea looked like the Mediterranean, and the mountains put on their most gorgeous raiments of many colours. It was as though the clerk of the weather felt sorry for the way he had treated us lately, and was anxious to show what he could really do. Charles got out his summer underclothing, and Mary insisted that it was the beginning of a belated Indian summer. Robert hadn't an idea what she meant, but refused steadily to be optimistic, and would only say that it was a wise man indeed who could say what could happen after such a day.

That night there was a sickly mist over the sky, which half hid the moon, and the following day it rained as though the bottom had dropped out of the heavens.

Then followed the exasperating period of wet days and gloriously fine, moonlight nights, with an occasional foxy day to keep us from giving up all hope.

Charles, who used to tap the glass at regular intervals throughout the day, informed us daily that this maddening breed of weather was caused by a series of small depressions which chased each other across the Atlantic at regular twelve-hour intervals, and reached us about breakfast-time. While Robert, who was very suspicious of the weather glass, and probably regarded it as some heathenish charm, insisted, to Charles's great annoyance, that the moon was the whole cause of the trouble.

When Patsey used to draw the bedroom curtains in the morning the daily depression would not have arrived, and the room would be flooded with the pale but brilliant winter sunshine, while the bay made one think of a fine summer's morning.

Breakfast over, we would sally forth, either to beat the sides of some near mountain for woodcock, or else to drive to some distant snipe ground.

Gradually a greasy scum would spread over the sky, the sunshine would vanish, while a thin little wind would spring up from the south to rapidly increase to half a gale, and bring up with it a deluge of icy cold rain.

Time after time we persisted in shooting on in this deluge, and always failed to find any birds—probably the cold rain kills all scent and the setters used to leave the birds behind them.

The red setters would do their best, grand beasts, working away as though there was no such thing as a deluge of rain, when a pointer would have been cowering behind the nearest bank or turf stack, or long ago left for home, tail well between his legs. But it was no use; the few birds we found the dogs would set all right, but they were very few and far between.

As a matter of fact, later on in December we experienced another series of these depressions, when for quite a fortnight the days were fine and calm, with nights of savage rain and wind.

With most of the leaves off the trees in the woods near the house we realized what a paradise for small birds the place was—on a still day the

woods and shrubberies round the house seemed to be literally alive with them.

Chaffinches and robins we had often seen through the summer and autumn, and Robert used to solemnly tell us how before the Christmas would come the young robins would kill all the old ones.

One wood of birch and hazel always held busy flocks of graceful, long-tailed tits, which, when we used to shoot woodcock there, would suddenly appear from nowhere and flit noiselessly from birch to hazel like a gay troupe of fairy gymnasts, swinging their tiny bodies and long tails round and round the almost invisible birch twigs one second, and then whirling round the stouter branches of a hazel bush.

It is almost impossible to believe that the midget goldcrest can make the long and stormy passage from the far north of Scandinavia to the wild west of Ireland, but make it he does and in good numbers. One day they were not, and the next every fir-tree held one or more of these midget wrens—a sure sign, Robert told us, that the woodcock were landed with us, adding that they made the journey on a woodcock's back.

Great tits, cole tits and swarms of blue tits, with their usual foraging companion, a silent tree-creeper, were everywhere. And nicest of all, the wee brown wrens, with their early morning and evening song in the silent woods of winter.

One still, frosty night the silence was broken for over two hours by the sharp bark of a fox in pain. The next morning Robert took us to look at some

traps he had set overnight on a small, green hill in the demesne about half a mile from the house ; in the first trap, set in a rabbit pad, we found the leg of a woodcock, and in the second, further along the pad, the fore-foot of a fox.

Robert's explanation was that, owing to the sudden sharp frost, the woodcock knew that its usual feeding ground in the Glenowen river valley was closed to it, and had been trying to find insects by turning over the dead bracken on the hill where it had the misfortune to meet the trap when crossing the rabbit pad. Then came along the fox, following the pad with the usual strange foolishness of all wild animals, and ate the woodcock, and passed along the pad to fall a victim to the second trap. He then showed us the fox's foot, which had obviously been gnawed through at the fetlock by its late owner, in his grim determination to be free, even at the price of a foot.

We settled down to a winter of shooting of every variety : snipe, woodcock, plover, geese, duck and rabbits, with an odd old cock grouse, made up our bags. And to long pleasant evenings over the great turf fire in the smoking-room, which Patsey never neglected to have ready for us when we came in from shooting.

And I think that the servants enjoyed the winter better than any other time of the year. Every evening the younger ones would dance like mad most of the night in the servants' hall, while the older men would sit up till any hour of the morning in the big harness-room, spinning yarns

and listening to a flute player called Johnny Vic, who worked on the estate as a labourer.

Johnny had a most quaint old flute—he had picked it up years ago in Lancashire, when working there as a harvester—which took in two, and so was most convenient for carrying in his waist-coat pocket.

The first evening Patsey invited Charles and myself to a concert in the harness-room, Johnny Vic unfortunately arrived late and “nicely,” having been delayed at two wakes on the way. For a long time there was a painful silence while Johnny fumbled in every pocket of his garments. At last Patsey could stand it no longer, and demanded of him, in a loud voice, what the blazes was on him to-night, and why he didn’t start playing for the gentlemen.

Johnny made no answer, had another good hunt through every pocket, and then announced in an injured voice that he couldn’t find the last half of his flute. Patsey then searched him thoroughly, produced the “last half” out of the lining of his old coat, put the two halves together, and ordered him to fire away.

Great puffing and blowing followed, Johnny appearing to be on the point of bursting, but nothing came out of the last half of the flute but a dismal wheeze. At last Johnny slowly put down the flute, and solemnly announced to the company: “I don’t know what the hell’s on the flute to-night, but I canna play her.” And on Patsey going to his help it was discovered that the last

half was stuffed with newspaper, which Johnny declared had been put there by that dirty Patsey, and for a long time refused to knock e'er a puff out of his old flute.

John, the gardener, then had a try, but could only produce very indifferent music. And when he stopped (as Patsey said, for very shame) Johnny Vic, who had never taken his eyes off him, said in a slow voice of scorn : “ *Ye might* make a gardener, but *ye'll never* make a flute player.”

In former days the hens under Kateen’s charge used to be allowed to wander about at their own sweet will, but Charles soon put a stop to this, refusing to allow them to be seen at all in front of the house, and gave Kateen strict orders to confine all poultry to barracks at all times.

One warm morning we were sitting at breakfast with the windows wide open when a large flock of Favorelle hens, with their queer, large topknots, appeared on the front drive, some of them even making an offer to come in at the open windows and join in our breakfast. One look from Charles and Maria fled for Kateen.

Presently Kateen came ambling round the corner of the house, her old shawl pulled over her head as though to ward off Charles’s wrath, and stopped at a safe distance to await the storm. But before Charles could get going Mary intervened to inquire after Jack, who had been laid up days at home. “ Well now, miss,” moaned Kateen, “ he’s badly, the crayture. He’s lying below in the bed, and I declare to God he’s that

bad ye'd see his thighs throbbing through the clothes like a spring fish lepping below in the river." Then she saw Charles, and remembering about the hens, started to drive them away, roaring at them : "Get along out o' that. Aren't ye bold, aren't ye stiff, and faces on ye like lions!" And their crests were just like the mane of a lion.

All odd carpentry jobs in the place were done by an old hedgerow carpenter, by name Thomaseen : his real name was, I believe, Thomas McHale, but being very small in every way he always went by the name of Thomaseen. Like most Irishmen, he could turn his hand to any job : chimney sweeping, stopping rat holes, working the threshing machine, and even on one occasion he was known to make quite a decent job of a broken-down pianola.

Mary complained that one day she had tried to get Thomaseen to do some small repair in the house, but had failed to get even an answer out of him. The next day I went to the old man's workshop and taxed him with his offence. After explaining at some length how he had spent a heavy night at his mother-in-law's wake (Patsey told us afterwards that the old lady had been planted a full ten years before), he said, in a voice full of remorse : "Oi beg yer honour's pardon, but they do tell me that oi made a great effort to salute her ladyship."

With the advent of cold and wet weather the rats, which had spent the summer in the woods and gardens, drew in towards the house, and took

up their winter quarters in the numerous out-buildings, and even came into the house.

When it grew dark we used to sally forth in rubber-soled boots, accompanied by Patsey, armed with acetylene bicycle lamps and ash-plants, and for an hour or more the sport would be fast and furious.

Caught in the open by the powerful light of a lamp a rat would be quite bothered and fall an easy victim to the ash-plant: but in the out-buildings one had to be mighty skilful and nippy with the plant to lay them out before they disappeared down one of their numerous holes.

Every evening, as soon as Porseen had cleared away the tay things from the smoking-room, Patsey would appear at the door, followed by two eager terriers, shivering with excitement, the rear brought up by Porseen, carrying the lamps and ash-plants.

Patsey, as ever the master rat-hunter, seemed to know by some unerring instinct where to find the rats, much the same as Robert knew where to look for snipe. One night the rats would be in the big cow-house, another in the stables, and on a night after Thomaseen had been working the threshing machine all day, Patsey would make us wear felt-soled slippers and steal up to the lofts.

The walls of these lofts were of rough limestone, and, if I had not seen it, I would never have believed it possible that rats could climb up the angle of two walls and disappear into the roof.

One night one of the terriers chased a rat across

the floor of a loft, but the rat had too great a start, and managed to climb up the angle of the walls out of reach before he could grip it. I then turned the lamp on the rat, thinking that the terrier would jump up and catch it, but instead he placed his forepaws on the walls and stood waiting, probably hoping the rat would slip and fall back into his mouth.

Then followed an uncanny sight. The dog stood there patiently watching the fast-disappearing rat, while rat after rat passed silently and swiftly under the dog's body, climbed up between his forelegs (the terrier's eyes were fixed all the time on the rat in front), and proceeded up the angle of the walls. In a short time there was a line of rats, nearly head to tail, from a foot above the terrier's mouth to the roof, fully ten feet from the floor. I stood spell-bound—it was like a nightmare—wondering if one of the rats would lose its nerve and bring an avalanche of rats on top of the stupefied terrier.

At first Charles was the keenest of the party, but after a bad accident one evening with one of John the gardener's barrels of liquid manure he gave up altogether, and Patsey and I used to carry on alone.

Charles was running along the top of a low wall outside the big garden in full cry after a huge rat, and jumped off the wall into what he fondly imagined was a heap of straw, but which by bad luck turned out to be a large barrel of liquid manure, which John had carefully camouflaged with straw.

Charles, as usual, was dressed with great care,

in what is commonly known as a smoking suit of a very tasteful green—I believe he called it bottle green—and when Patsey and I had extracted him with great difficulty from the barrel he was a dark brown to his waist and a bright green above, and over all a terrible smell.

The question then was what to do with Charles, whose one idea was to get away from his own smell and get at John the gardener. Patsey tactfully suggested a run down to the “say.” I firmly refused to allow him into the house in his present condition. In the end we removed the outer layers with the carriage hose, while Porseen was sent into the house for a dressing-gown and pair of slippers.

Then Charles, who all the time kept asking Patsey where John was to be found at that time of the evening—to be told he had gone to a wake up the mountains, and not expected back till after dawn—was stripped by Porseen in a stable, wrapped in the dressing-gown, and hurried off by Patsey to a hot bath. And that was the end of Charles’s after-tea ratting.

John did, as a matter of fact, disappear for three days, and was then found by Robert in a mountain farm, drinking poteen.

When we first began to go ratting Mary used to insist on Dash going with us, but a few surreptitious tips from the ash-plants soon made him prefer the smoking-room fire to ratting, and on the appearance of Patsey and Porseen he would retire behind a settee.

It is on record, however, that Dash once tackled a live rat, and under most peculiar circumstances.

One night, while we were sitting in the smoking-room, Dash suddenly left his place in front of the fire, sniffed the curtains of one of the windows, and then sat up and gazed intently at the top of the curtains. Mary exclaimed how wise he looked, but we were not to be drawn.

Presently the dog, still gazing at the curtains, started to whimper, and after this had gone on for some minutes Charles threw his book at him. A sharp passage of arms followed between Mary and Charles, Dash returned to the fire with an injured expression, and we all settled down to read again, fondly hoping that the incident was closed.

But our luck was out that night, and in a very short time I could see, out of the corner of my eye, the dog sneaking back to the curtain, with a wary eye on Charles's book ; but before Charles could anticipate the whimpering with his novel Mary screamed : "Look ! there's a huge rat at the top of the curtain. *I knew* Dash was right."

And sure enough, at the very top of one of the curtains hung a fine rat, head downwards and to all appearances hanging on carelessly by his claws.

Charles seized the poker, Mary held the dog, and I started to shake the curtain. At first I only gave a gentle shake, thinking to easily dislodge the rat, but when this had no effect I shook for all I was worth, and with every shake the dog let out an agonizing bark.

But after fully five minutes of hard and violent

shaking the rat remained in exactly the same careless attitude, as though it was part and parcel of the curtain itself. Charles then had a try, but with the same result, and the rat continued to gaze down on us, apparently quite unconcerned.

Then, as in all emergencies, Patsey was called in, and at once insisted that he could easily shake the rat off, and of course with the same result. Puzzled at his failure, Patsey yelled for Porgeen, and when the old man appeared ordered him to hold the lamp above his head so that he could get a better view. The rat remained quite unconcerned and never moved a hair's breadth from its original position.

Hardly had Porgeen held up the lamp when Patsey exclaimed in a frightened whisper: "I declare to God I can see a charm stuck on the baste's neck. Let it be, Master Charles" (who was making for the curtain once more), "we'll have no luck if ye lay a hand on that same rat." But Charles had by now seized the curtain, and, giving a terrific jerk, brought down curtain and rat on top of us.

Patsey fled with a yell of fear, but luckily Porgeen had no fear of rats or charms and, with a grin of contempt at the fleeing Patsey, set down the lamp on the table as though he feared nothing in this wide world.

Dash belonged to that annoying breed of dog which, when led on a leash, pretends that if only he could gain his freedom he would destroy every dog which appeared on the horizon; and the

bigger the dog the fiercer the growls of the led one, knowing full well he will not be allowed to make good his growls.

At the time the curtain collapsed Mary was, as usual, holding on to Dash tight with both hands, but at Patsey's wild yells she let go, and the dog at once drove straight at curtain and rat in the most approved style, in spite of Mary's cries, and disappeared.

Probably the dog was overcome with excitement or thought that Mary was still holding him. Charles confided to me afterwards that he was sure the brute could not resist the chance of taking a mean advantage of the rat whilst helpless in the folds of the curtain.

Before anyone could or would go to the rescue, Dash reappeared, howling at the top of his voice, with the rat apparently glued to the end of his snout and the curtain at the end of the rat. Backwards he went at an incredible pace straight into the legs of Maria, who, attracted by the noise, had hastened to find out what diversion was afoot.

Urged by Mary, Charles and I now caught Dash, and found that the rat was firmly anchored to the curtain by an Archer live bait flight of hooks, a spare hook of which was fixed in Dash's snout.

Peace being at last restored, we reconstructed the tragedy over a much-needed whisky and soda, while Mary and Maria bathed Dash's snout with warm water and Condyl's Fluid.

We came to the conclusion that the rat must have been wandering over the smoking-room desk,

and had been smelling the remains of a trout on the Archer tackle, left lying about by the careless Charles. Then someone—probably Porgeen going to put turf on the fire—must have startled the rat, and in the hurry to escape it must have got entangled in a hook. Finding escape through the doorway cut off, it must have run up the curtain, and when it turned at the top one hook must have got caught in the curtain, and there the rat remained anchored until that fool Dash spotted it.

Before Mary had finished with him Charles retired to bed, but he never left any flights of hooks lying about in the smoking-room again.

XIV

PROBABLY no form of shooting in the British Isles demands greater skill in shooting and a keener study of the habits of birds than snipe; and, in addition, to be successful one must be fit and hardy. A tired or soft man will always bring his gun up just that fraction of a second too late which saves the life of many a snipe.

Pheasants can always be found in or close to the coverts in which they have been reared. Any fine autumn morning you may see them walking about your lawns while you eat your breakfast. Partridges never stray far from their own particular root and stubble fields. Duck, except in very hard weather, can be relied on with certainty to be found resting during the daytime on the same sheet of water with monotonous regularity. But of that elusive pimpernel of wild game birds the snipe it is always true to say he is here to-day and gone to-morrow—the whole secret of successful snipe-shooting turns on the difficulty of hitting off the right to-day.

There is very little doubt that a hard winter will affect the supply of foreign snipe in Ireland for some seasons to a certain degree, but, in reality, the main factor governing this supply is what is commonly

known as the luck of migration. Granted ideal weather conditions by Nature during the time of the main flight from their vast breeding grounds in the north of Europe, the chances are that not a snipe falls by the way; but if the weather is stormy and they encounter persistent adverse winds, it is probable whole flights of thousands of snipe become exhausted and, failing to reach land, perish at sea. And it is the same with woodcock, which have on a few occasions been seen floating dead at sea in large numbers after a long and heavy storm during the early winter time.

Money can produce pheasants, partridges and duck in almost unlimited numbers, but all the gold of all the profiteers in England could not produce a single extra snipe in a bad season in Ireland. And herein lies the greatest charm of snipe shooting to all true sportsmen.

Robert's cuteness in knowing where to find snipe was at times uncanny; like all Irishmen, when their heart is in a sport they excel beyond any other race in the world.

Every setter in the place was handled by Robert from its youth to old age, and one and all adored him, though probably to a stranger he must have appeared a cruel task-master. But the setters knew that Robert was mostly bark and very little bite.

Robert had one rogue setter called Mungo, which he would never take out shooting with us, and when pressed by Charles would give various vague excuses. At last came a day when even Robert's excuses

were exhausted, and he agreed reluctantly to produce Mungo the following day.

After a drive of about six miles we sent the car home and started to shoot a mountain valley for snipe: Robert in the middle, working Mungo, and Charles and I on either flank.

Robert was obviously ill at ease, though at the start Mungo worked in faultless style, and when the dog began to show signs of being near game he said to Charles: "It would be well to let himself" (meaning me) "have the first shots." Before Charles could ask what the devil he meant Mungo set stiff, and up rose a brace of snipe in front of Charles, which he missed clean.

Robert looked furious, while Mungo, who had curious light-coloured eyes, regarded each of us in turn with grave suspicion and refused to advance. However, after a wonderful flow of blarney from Robert, the dog thought better of it and started to work again, and very soon found a second brace of snipe, which Charles again let go.

This finished Mungo, who gave Charles one horrible look, tucked his tail well between his legs, and set off for home at a fourteen mile an hour trot, regardless of a torrent of curses and terms of endearment in English and Irish from the half-crazy Robert. And that was the end of our day's shooting, and the last time we ever took Master Mungo out.

Robert told me afterwards that the dog had always been the same ever since he was a puppy —miss the first few birds and he could not get

home fast enough, shoot them and he would work for the rest of the day as well as any setter ever born.

Charles was for a very short time the proud possessor of a setter of his very own—a birthday present from Mary, purchased from a poacher in the streets of Eastport.

Mary arrived home full of the virtues of this wonderful setter, and the following day insisted on going out shooting to see her pet perform. I pleaded letters and remained at home.

Two hours saw the party home again, Mary in tears, Charles unable to speak for rage, and Robert bringing up the rear with the poacher's dog in chains.

Neither Mary nor Charles would tell me anything, but of course Robert had a good story for me.

It seemed that the first game put up by the setter was a fine hare, which Charles missed clean with both barrels; the setter gave chase in full cry, and the two disappeared up the side of a mountain. The party then sat down, not knowing quite what else to do.

After some time the setter returned, carrying the dead hare in its mouth, which it proceeded to lay at Charles's feet, wag its tail and sit down.

An old countryman, who happened to be passing, thinking to please Charles, said: "Isn't yer honour blessed with a grand dog."

"Why?" asked Charles foolishly.

"Everywhy," replied the old man. "Sure, if yer honour misses a hare won't he catch her for ye."

I never heard what happened to Charles's harrier, but the next morning he set off in Lizzie with Robert and the dog at the back, and we never saw the harrier again. Charles said he gave him to a blind beggar in Eastport—but from Robert I could never get a word.

The finest day's snipe shooting we had at all was on some other man's shooting; probably Robert often took us poaching—the estate was so large that it was impossible for us always to know if we were on or off it.

On this particular occasion we knew all right, as a few days afterwards we received an indignant and offensive letter from the owner of the shooting, who wanted to know if it was possible that we could not have enough shooting of our own without poaching his, and ended up by saying that the next time we went we would, maybe, like him to put us up for the night, in order that we might put in a full day's shooting.

We had to waste a whole fine day afterwards going over to apologize for this unfortunate incident, but agreed on the way home that it had been well worth all the unpleasantness. Robert, when taxed by Charles with his iniquity, was quite unrepentant, saying that "The man couldn't hit a cow with a stick, and anyway it was a charity to shoot the place properly for him."

At the time we had failed for some days to find snipe, and I could see that Robert had something on his mind. One evening, after a particularly bad day, he told us that there was only one place

where the birds could be stuck and that was Barley Hill. He went on to explain that when most of the country was flooded, after very heavy rain, all the snipe in the West would collect there, and went into raptures over the wonderful bags the master used to make on this beat. And when we expressed surprise at not having been taken to this snipe Eldorado before he looked foolish, and explained lamely that it was so far away he hadn't liked to bother us with such a long journey.

It was a raw, foggy morning when we set off in Lizzie, soon after dawn, for Barley Hill. Robert brought his best brace of setters, and Charles a long, mysterious-looking wooden box, which he announced contained a silk kite to make the snipe lie. Robert always used to call it Master Charles's hawk.

When passing through a mountain valley Robert's keen eye spotted a fine stand of golden plover ahead of us and close to the roadside, and packed as tight together as though, as Robert put it, "the birdeens were afeared of losing sight of each other in the fog."

Robert had told Charles to stop, and when we got out ordered us to shoulder our guns and try and look like a party of turf-cutters making their way to a bog.

Walking slowly along the edge of the road, without once looking at the plover, we got close up to the stand, and to all appearances they were sound asleep after a heavy night's feed. Two barrels on the ground and two as they rose produced

fifteen brace of golden plover, though the wounded took us some time to pick up. A good start, and, as Robert remarked, with an eye on Charles, if we didn't hit another thing we would have a good bag to take home with us.

At the end of this valley we passed the ruins of a cottage, standing back from the road about two hundred yards; just a gable-end with the large open hearth, the rest a heap of stones.

The ruined cottages in the West of Ireland—the only remains of a whole generation—most of the survivors faded away to America—are one of the saddest sights imaginable: silent and lasting monuments of the aftermath of the Great Famine. Robert must have seen me looking at these ruins, and, without being asked, told us their history.

What he described as a powerful long while ago there lived here a man called Gallagher, with his wife and family—"The meanest man from here to himself; sure he'd starve a fly," was the character Robert gave him.

After the famine Gallagher left his wife and family, and cut away to America, and was never heard of again. Biddy, the old wife, tried her best to carry on; got sick and took to her bed, and there she stayed for a couple of years. Finally came the inevitable eviction order, always the last chapter of an Irish tragedy in those days.

The police arrived and carried the few sticks of furniture out on to the road; the sergeant then told Biddy to "get up out o' that and clear." But when Biddy flatly refused to move the police were

nonplussed to know what to do next. The sergeant then had a brain wave and threatened to set fire to Biddy's bed ; whereupon the usual crowd of old women, who invariably collect at every wake, wedding, eviction and fight, screamed : "Stay where ye are, Biddy, agra. Let him burn ye—sure we'll see ye righted."

In the end the police had to laboriously saw out the bed and carry Biddy and bed to the road. And the story ended in the Eastport workhouse.

Barley Hill was quite unlike any other ground we shot at any time ; really the best description of it was a large valley on top of a low hill.

Once we were clear of the mountains we passed through miles of low-lying, water-logged land—too wet to hold snipe—until we reached the Barley Hill valley, which, though wet, had plenty of cover and looked to be in just the right condition to hold snipe. Probably the heavy floods used to drive all the birds off the surrounding low-lying ground on to Barley Hill.

In the middle of the valley stood the remains of the usual ugly, square country house of those days, surrounded by a small demesne with some magnificent old beech trees. Many of these trees were now dead, and it seemed that when the roots reached a certain depth the trees died. All the ditches were completely choked, and the whole place bore an air of neglect and decay.

Robert told us that the estate had once belonged to a real old Irish gentleman, who kept a pack of hounds, with which he hunted seven days, and who

never allowed any man to leave the house hungry, or sober.

We put Lizzie up at a farm-house, and I remembered afterwards that the owner—Martin Flanagan—though most polite, seemed surprised to see us, but after a greeting shot of whisky from Robert he became very friendly.

Charles wasted some time by insisting on flying his kite at the start, and after a lot of fuss got the “hawk” going and handed the string to Robert.

Most of the shooting ground consisted of large grazing fields, which, owing to the ditches having been choked for years, were full of great patches of rushes; the soil appeared to be a heavy, light-coloured clay, and very holding. Here and there, for no apparent reason, queer little old cut-away bogs cropped up in odd places.

We started shooting at last in one of the bogs, a silent, dreary-looking spot, with not a visible sign of bird life on its surface of dark water and tufts of many-coloured coarse grass.

Robert, walking up wind on one side of the bog brought the hawk dexterously over the centre, whilst Charles and I walked along two causeways, and Martin brought up the rear, leading the setters and carrying the game-bags.

Before the hawk was within a hundred yards of the middle of the bog a huge wisp of snipe rose as one bird (Robert said afterwards you could have covered the lot with a good-sized quilt), with a chorus of frightened screeches, and disappeared

into the blue. Charles and I were so startled that we both slipped off the narrow causeways and got well bogged, Charles being so unnerved that he let off his gun and peppered Robert.

Then followed pandemonium : the setters barked, Charles cursed, Martin shouted out that the man was murdered, and Robert, dropping the hawk string, clapped his hands over his ears and ran round in circles, screaming : “ Oh, by go ! Oh, by go ! Them O'Reilley's Ballistrites is great cartridges—the shot comes red hot out of the barrels.”

However, peace was at last restored ; Robert given an extra powerful shot of neat whisky, the hawk retrieved, and we started off once more—Charles and I black to our waists and dripping.

When Robert appeared normal again Charles, by way of being friendly, asked him what he thought of the kite ; and Robert replied, with a sour grin : “ It's a great yoke entirely—the finest I ever seen for scattering the birdeens.” As a matter of fact, Robert's bitter jest turned out afterwards to be true : I am sure we met most of that big wisp again, scattered through the rushy fields, and when in small numbers they lay like stones to the hawk.

After this we had no further regrettable incidents, though once I nearly shot Martin, who had a disagreeable habit of taking short cuts, which generally brought him unexpectedly in front of the guns. And when I cursed him for suddenly sticking his head round a bush when I was going to fire at

a snipe, he replied, with a light laugh, "No danger, shoot away. Sure, wasn't I watching yer gun!"

We at last settled down to steady shooting, and, with the setters working like machines and the hawk intimidating the scattered snipe, the bag soon began to mount up.

Just before we stopped for lunch Robert drew our attention to two large hawks, evidently peregrines, rapidly approaching us, and suggested taking in our hawk in case they might be going to attack it.

But before the argument could be concluded a huge flock of green plover rose from a field about four hundred yards ahead of us, and began to climb rapidly into the skies, with excited cries of alarm.

The larger of the two hawks, the smaller standing by, suddenly swooped on the unfortunate plover, and drove through and through them time after time, and at each attack striking down a plover, apparently in wanton play.

Then the larger hawk stood by while the smaller one took up the attack, but in a slower and awkward style.

Robert declared that he had seen such a sight before—generally in the early autumn—and that it was the mother peregrine teaching her young one to hunt.

After a time the young peregrine stopped; both hawks then flew round our hawk, and being satisfied that there was no fight in it, flew away, leaving the ground covered with dead plover, and without

making an effort to remove a single bird for food.

Teal were even more affected by the hawk than the snipe, and one small lot we put up with great difficulty out of a stream flew away almost touching the ground, twisting like snipe. Robert declared that one flew between his legs in its hurry to escape from the hawk.

On the very top of a small hillock Charles got a right and left woodcock, and on another I was lucky to bring down a mallard and a duck.

We picked up odd pheasants everywhere, a brace of partridges (the only ones we saw), a rocketting curlew and a few rabbits. We saw plenty of golden plover, but did not get within shot of any again.

Wherever the covert was heavy we found hares in great numbers ; but, after shooting eight, let them go, as Robert and Martin protested they could carry no more without another flask of whisky.

Once Charles declared that he had shot a hare and a snipe with one shot, but said no more when Robert in silent contempt picked up and held out to him a dead lark.

Soon after lunch the wind veered round to the north-west, and the day grew much cooler, with frequent heavy, driving showers. The snipe were at once affected by the change and became wild ; we then tied up the setters and shot each beat down-wind, in line with the hawk well ahead.

In the dusk a tired and dirty but contented party staggered into the welcome light and warmth

of Martin's house, with empty cartridge bags and flasks but full game-bags ; Robert and Martin declaring they could not walk another yard for the weight of game and strength of the whisky.

Robert spread out the game on the kitchen floor—the best mixed bag we ever made : sixty-eight snipe, thirty golden plover, four green plover, eight hares, one curlew, two partridges, two woodcock, two duck, seven teal, ten pheasants and six rabbits.

We then retired to different bedrooms to change ; but in a few minutes Charles rushed into my room in his shirt and slammed the door. It seemed that as he was on the point of trying to clean himself in a tin basin holding about a quart of brown bog water, he heard a fearful groan from a dark corner of the room, and to his horror found that it came from an old woman lying in bed.

Charles apologized profusely, trying hard to hide his bare legs, whereupon the old woman—who was Mrs. Martin, lying ill in bed—replied, with another groan, “ Ah, no harm, me dear—sure, I’m riveted ”—and Charles fled in horror.

At tea Robert was more excited than I had ever seen him—probably partly delight at having poached another man’s shooting to such a good tune, and the remainder poteen and whisky well mixed—and told us about the time he had above in Dublin when the mistress took him there on a visit once.

A circus seemed to have made most impression on his mind, where he saw “ The grandest woman

you ever saw lepping through paper hoops, and she standing on a hoss's back on one leg, no lie, and devil a flitter on her, and she pink all over."

Charles suggested pink tights. "Tight is it," snorted the indignant Robert, "and could she lep on a hoss's back and she tight!"

Charles began to look cross, and I quickly changed the subject, asking Robert to tell us what he thought of the city.

Next to the circus the trams remained uppermost in Robert's memory. The mistress was staying at Killiney, a few miles outside Dublin, and the first day Robert was sent up with the butler to see the sights of the city. The butler, probably on purpose, promptly lost Robert, who wandered about on his own until his inside told him it was time to get back to Killiney.

Having come up by tram he thought he had only to get into one to be whirled home to Killiney. Unfortunately the place he picked to board one was about a hundred yards from Nelson's Pillar, where all trams stopped.

Tram after tram he got into, only to be put out every time at the Pillar, when he would return doggedly to his starting point. At last a policeman, being suspicious of Robert's behaviour, threatened to arrest him if he did it again. Explanations followed and the peeler then put Robert into the right tram.

But what amused us most was Robert's story of the afternoon tram which he usually caught from Killiney to Dublin; and of how the tram

always stopped at a certain shop while the conductor, many of the passengers, and sometimes even the driver, all got out and went to a certain shop in a certain street, which sold the cheapest bacon in Dublin.

And then the long drive home through the dark winter's night, with the happy memory of a great day's shooting to occupy one's thoughts.

And it was wonderful how we managed in the dark—though Martin held a swaying, guttering candle—to pack Robert ("nicely"), setters, gun-cases, dirty boots, game-bags and the great heap of game into the back of Lizzie. And when we had at last found a place for everything Robert said with a roar: "It would tighten ye now to find a sate for Master Charles's larkeen."

Afterwards, when we found out that we had been merely common poachers on Barley Hill, I asked Robert how it was that Martin, who was supposed to be the game-watcher there, never asked us if we had leave from his master to shoot. "Oh," laughed Robert, "didn't he think from the grand style of us we must have the leave—and anyhow the likes of Martin would be too polite to ever think that two rale gentlemen like yerself and Master Charles would ever think of poaching, let alone do it."

And we left it at that.

XV

ON a "foxy" morning, when the Gulf Stream was functioning well, it was hard to believe that we were not living on the shores of the Mediterranean. On such a morning we would have breakfast with every window wide open; not only that we might see the wonderful view of blue sea and golden brown mountains better, but also to enjoy the soft air.

If we were at all late on a shooting morning Jack, whose only watch was his bread-basket, would generally appear in front of the dining-room windows and trot up and down impatiently until we were ready to start.

One morning we lingered longer than usual over breakfast, overcome by the lazy feeling caused by the soft balmy air, when suddenly it struck the pensive Charles that there was something unusual about Jack's get-up.

Closer inspection showed that he had discarded his reverence's old black wideawake for a smart and stylish-looking bowler.

Charles, whose suspicions were now aroused by a strangely familiar look of the hat, called Jack over to the window, and asked him, in a stern voice, where he had got his new hat from. For some

time Jack would only grin, but, when hard pressed, said with a simper that Patsey had put it on his head, so he had.

Patsey was then sent for, and when asked for an explanation declared, with a fine show of assumed carelessness, that it was "an auld hat he had found in the hall—probably a discarded one of the master's."

Charles, now thoroughly aroused, took off the offending hat, and sure enough it was his best Sunday-go-to-meeting A. J. White bowler.

The soporific effect of the soft air had by now quite worn off Charles, who demanded sharply of Patsey what right he had to give the hat to Jack ; and Patsey, never defeated for an answer, announced with an air of scorn that indeed he didn't think it was wanted as Master Charles never wore it—"Sure, hadn't it been lying in the hall since his honour came, and 'deed it wasn't of much value after."

Matters now began to look serious, when Robert saved the situation nobly by poking his head through another window and announcing, in a loud voice of satisfaction—"Praise be to God, they're landed at last." And on inquiry "they" turned out to be the long-expected and anxiously looked for wild geese.

Robert told us how he had felt in his bones that morning when he woke up that the wild geese would likely come to-day ; and sure enough, as soon as he was dressed and out didn't he see a great V of them, flying high in the sky to the north (he described the

sky as being black with them) and heading straight for the great bog to the north-east of the demesne.

He told us how they would rest that day in the big bog, and at night, as soon as the moon was up, they would fly to some small lakes high up in the mountains, and there remain until they had thoroughly recovered from their exhausting flight from the far north (Robert thought they came every year from the North Pole).

After that he added we would see them every day; as he put it—"Generally nearly always they comes in twos after other."

And see them we did practically every day during the winter, except when a very hard frost and heavy snow about Christmas-time drove them to the sea shores in search of food.

If let alone by man, white-fronted geese probably live the most orderly and punctual lives of any wild birds, or indeed of any human beings; and it was not long before we knew their time-table to the minute, the only alteration of which was caused by the hour the moon rose.

The wild geese used to start their day when the moon rose, or, when there was no moonlight, an hour before dawn. At that hour they would leave the big bog in flocks and flight up to the meadows on the banks of the Glenowen river, always crossing the demesne, though their actual route varied according to the strength and direction of the wind.

Here they would feed, make their toilets, and sometimes take a nap until an hour before sunset,

when they would again cross the demesne *en route* for the big bog and bed.

On a winter's afternoon there was no finer sight in that wildest of wild places than these great flocks of geese, sometimes rigidly keeping their V formation, with some old black gander leading, and other times flying in flocks, passing over the demesne, and even sometimes flying right over the house, when their cackle would be deafening.

Patsey had a great story of how a flock once got completely bothered in a fog and two geese must have broken their necks against the high chimney stacks : at any rate, Porseen, going up on to the roof of the house that same evening to visit a secret hoard of poteen, found two freshly killed geese lying on the leads at the foot of a chimney stack, and brought them in triumph to the pantry.

When there was no wind the geese would pass over at a great height ; but if they had a strong head wind they would fly lower than any bird I know. In fact, when flying against half a gale I have seen them forced to rise in order to clear a low bank in their line of flight.

Unfortunately all the conditions required to enable us to get on terms with the geese at night were seldom all forthcoming at the same time. The first great necessity was a strong south-south-east wind—the stronger the better ; the second, that the moon should rise at about eleven p.m., and lastly, but not least, that Robert should anticipate their line of flight most accurately.

I think that he was keener on wild geese shooting

than anything else on earth ; and I am full sure that if he lay dying on a winter's night and heard a south-south-east gale spring up, he would have staggered out of his death-bed and crawled to his favourite green hill in the demesne. And when in good health no weather conditions nor any ghost, however powerful, would ever have stopped him from spending the whole night out in the demesne, as long as there was the slightest chance of a shot at a wild goose.

There are few pleasanter sensations, after a long day's snipe shooting, a hot bath and a good dinner, than a comfortable arm-chair and the glow of a good turf fire on a wild winter's night. But as sure as a strong south-south-east wind sprang up so surely would there come a tap at the smoking-room window, and, on opening, we would find Robert standing outside, muffled up to the eyes and carrying a double-barrelled eight bore of the old master's, as long as himself.

There was never any question of would we be thinking of going out after geese the night ? or whether we were too tired to face out again ? Robert would simply give us an order that it was time to get changed out of our fancy clothes, as we would have to start in half an hour's time. And even Charles never even thought of not obeying.

Sometimes it was hateful work changing our fancy clothes for heavy shooting suits and macintoshes and turning out into the dark and wet night ; but once well under way all this was forgotten in the fascination of the sport.

After the brightness of the smoking-room the night used to seem to us like the inside of a cow, and we had to link arms with Robert like two blind men.

The appearance of the moon from behind the mountains was always the signal for the first flock to leave the big bog ; and, as a rule, the remainder followed at fairly even intervals of a few minutes.

However unpunctual Robert might be in his ordinary duties, he always took good care that we should be in time for the geese ; and he would select a place where a bank gave shelter from the wind, and also acted as a background.

At first we could see nothing but the black darkness of the night, and hear nothing but the howling of the wind. Gradually our eyes became accustomed to the darkness, and by the time the moonlight began to filter through we could see quite well.

And the scene was most vivid and beautiful. Away to the west lay the sea, a great silver streak, cutting clean through the inky blackness of the surrounding mountains, the edges of which showed up sharply against the ever-brightening sky. And away below us stretched the big bog, a brownish black, covered with dots of silver, the reflection of the moonlight in the water of the bogholes. And over all the extraordinary feeling it gave one of being clean and clear out of all civilization, away in the heart of the wilds.

In nearly every way the white-fronted goose is as cute as any wild bird or animal in the British Isles,

but he has one bad weakness (common to many humans), in that he can never learn to hold his tongue, and this is often his undoing.

One's mind would be completely absorbed in the beauty of the scenery when suddenly one's ears would just catch the first faint silly cackle of some old gander starting to lead his family party from the bog to the meadows. Then the tense excitement of anticipation, the opening of one's gun to make sure it was loaded, and the straining of one's eyes to catch the first glimpse of the flock.

Gradually the cackle would grow louder as the flock came nearer ; and then the agonizing feeling that the flock was going to pass wide of us.

Worse still, a silence would follow, to be suddenly broken by a Babel of cackling as the geese were upon us.

Up would jump Robert, with a yell of triumph—his quick eye had picked up the shadowy forms of the birds before we could see a sign of them—up would go his old eight bore, looking like a young cannon in the moonlight, quickly followed by a flash and a roar.

But at the first shot the geese, with incredible swiftness for so unwieldy a bird, would tower straight up into the sky, and at the same time hurl themselves backwards into the wind, and disappear like a flash, with a chorus of curses, in the direction of the big bog. The victims would then be gathered, and we would settle down once more to await the next flock.

But the really successful nights after geese were

few and far between, though none the less pleasant for that.

Even when all conditions were favourable something might easily go wrong. The geese might pass time after time just out of shot, and when we would move our position the next flock would fly straight over the position we had just left. The shooting might not be up to the mark, and sometimes, when the wind was very strong, the geese might flight up in two, or even one huge flock.

Eighteen was the best bag we ever made, and we had hard work to carry them home against half a gale of wind and rain ; but we would sooner have stayed out all night than have left a single bird behind us.

As a rule the birds were easy to pick up—especially if they fell on their backs, when their barred breasts showed up distinctly in the moonlight ; but a bird lying on its breast used sometimes to be the very devil to find if the light was bad. Any bird left out all night would be eaten by rats, and useless the following morning.

Duck, teal and widgeon followed practically the same lines of flight across the demesne ; their time being just before dusk. The flight of the wild duck and teal was always in or about twenty minutes, the widgeon coming later and often straggling up most of the night.

Ten minutes before the flight started we would hear the cry of a single snipe, passing overhead to the night feeding grounds.

Unfortunately the widgeon always came when

it was too dark to shoot, and it used to madden us hearing the rush of wings close by and not be able to see or shoot them. The wilder the night the earlier the flight started, and, of course, the stronger the head wind the lower they flew.

Robert, the real poacher at heart, had a great plan for defeating the widgeon, and often begged us to try it, but we always had the decency to refuse. He wanted us to put up a line of rabbit wire on posts across the valleys up which the widgeon flew when the wind was very strong ; and I am sure that if we had we would have murdered the unfortunate widgeon wholesale. No matter how strong the wind they always flew at a wonderful pace, and so low in a gale that the rush of their wings sounded distinctly below the level of our ears standing. They would never have noticed the wire, and the impact would have broken their necks to a certainty.

There were literally thousands of widgeon in the country, and the probabilities are that we would have made a terrible death with Robert's wire.

Robert was full of weird schemes, some mad and others excellent, and one I shall never forget. Afterwards everyone wanted to take the credit of the idea, but to Robert alone belonged the entire credit.

It was on a Sunday morning that Robert had his great brain wave, and before going to Mass he started off hot haste to tell us. By bad luck, the first person he met after leaving his house was a red-headed woman. I have known him beg us

to turn back from a day's shooting when the first person we happened to meet had red hair—and, fearing that this unfortunate encounter would bring bad luck on his plan, he reluctantly returned home to await the following day.

Monday morning found Robert at the smoking-room window when we came down to breakfast, and he refused to let us start until he had unburdened himself.

His plan was to make an imitation cow, not a whole cow, as he explained, but a half one ; and with this he was full sure that we could get so close to the geese that we could put salt on their tails, and as for the plover—sure, there wouldn't be one left in the country by Christmas-time.

Breakfast over, we adjourned to Thomaseen's workshop to work out with his assistance the details of Robert's half cow, and by lunch-time had turned out the finished article.

First we made an outline of a cow's body with strips of wood ; then the frame of her head, covering both with loose sacking. Wooden horns and a long rope tail, with the end well frayed out, completed the first stage.

For some time we were defeated how to get the rounded effect of a cow's side, but Thomaseen came to the rescue by suggesting springing out her side with willow ribs, and Robert at once christened his cow Willow.

Lastly Mary appeared, enveloped in an overall and with two pots of red and white paint, and in a short time had painted Willow an artistic red

with white patches, not forgetting to put in a large, mild eye.

Robert was all for starting off for the meadows of the Glenowen river after geese at once, but was with difficulty persuaded to allow Willow to dry while we had lunch.

It may have been noticed that we did not give the half cow any legs ; Robert's idea being that two stalkers should carry Willow, crouching on the blind side, fore and aft, and that their legs would then appear to belong to Willow.

At Charles's suggestion we tried Willow on Dash, but with very doubtful results. Dash had never been known to let a cow pass without indulging in a prolonged and irritating spell of barking. Mary used to ascribe this to his desire to defend us from all cows and danger ; but directly he caught sight of Charles and Robert merged in Willow he let out one terrified yowl and promptly took cover under Mary's bed for the remainder of the afternoon. And both Charles and I made a mental note, with a view to disposing of the dog in the future when his absence would be preferable to his company.

The afternoon turned out very wet, and, in spite of Robert's protests, we postponed the attack on the geese until the weather conditions were more favourable. That night the wind shifted, the rain turned to sleet, and then to snow, and when we got up the following morning the ground was covered with snow, with a light sea fog spreading inland for several miles.

We waited impatiently until after lunch, hoping that the fog would lift, but it grew thicker. Robert's plan was to row up the Glenowen river to a bend where, he said, there was some ground full of small springs, and sure to hold all the geese in the country during snow.

Neither Charles nor I had the heart to suggest leaving Robert out of the stalk, and, as Willow only required two pair of legs, we drew lots and I won.

Robert offered me the honour of forming Willow's forelegs, but I declined firmly, pleading ignorance of the ground in the now thick fog—and, though I did not care to say so, I did not like the idea of an exciting stalk with the muzzle of Robert's cocked hammer gun in the small of my back.

For some time we crept along, holding Willow with our right hands and with backs bent and bowed heads, a position which soon brought on a terrible backache.

The fog had swallowed us up directly we started, and I soon lost all sense of direction. At last, when I was full sure that we were completely lost on a real wild goose chase, and my back felt as though it must break any minute, I felt Robert plunge forward, while his breath came in excited gasps, and knew that he must have either heard or smelt geese.

Then I fancied I heard a faint and very low kind of pleased cackle, which grew louder and louder every yard we advanced. Another few yards and

the snow was beaten flat by the feet of many geese, but, though their voices sounded all round my feet, not a sign of a goose could I see.

We then met a drain, which looked very wet and cold, and simultaneously turned left-handed ; and had only gone a short distance when we literally came right on top of three geese feeding on the tender grass in the drain.

They took no notice of Willow, not even raising their heads when she passed ; and it was most interesting watching them (we each had a spy hole through Willow, Robert a hole in her head and I one through her hind quarters) catch hold of the grass and, with a corkscrew twist of their strong necks, tear it up.

Another twenty yards and the ground appeared to be black with geese—probably the first ones we had met were sentries, taking advantage of the fog to feed at their posts. This was altogether too much for Robert, who dropped Willow's head with a yell and fired, and I followed suit.

At the shots the whole ground seemed to rise up with a roar of wings and a furious cackling, and we were left alone in the silence and gloom of the fog. We picked up five geese, two of which were runners and gave us a lot of trouble.

But if we had deceived the geese well, we had also scared them badly, and not a goose was seen afterwards for a week.

We tried Willow again and again on the geese—even by moonlight—but directly a sentry caught sight of the red and white cow with stockings on

her legs, every goose within sight or hearing of the sentry took to the mountains.

Green and gold plover generally fell easy victims to our half cow for a long time ; but the wily curlew would have none of her, and we failed to get within an ass's roar of wild duck.

Charles and Robert even made an expedition across the bay with Willow after wild goats, but with poor results.

On their return in the evening they left Willow in the boat ; shortly afterwards Patsey dashed into the smoking-room to tell us to get our guns quick. It seemed that some of the farm-hands had been going to borrow a boat to go to a dance across the bay, and had rushed back to the house, swearing that there was a fearful "say baste" curled up asleep in the stern of Master Charles's boat.

XVI

TIME flew at "Rackrent Hall," and before we realized it we were well into December and the best of the snipe-shooting was over.

The servants were a never-ending source of amusement and wonder to us, and every evening Mary would have a fresh tale of their queer sayings and doings for us.

One morning she had heard a fearful noise and shouting coming from Sarah's room, as though she and Eliza were on the point of murdering each other, and on rushing in to separate them found that it was only an argument over Sarah's false teeth.

It appeared that Sarah had smelt something burning in the grate—a powerful smell—and on raking the ashes discovered the remains of her lower set of false teeth, which must have slipped out unbeknownst to her when she was boiling the kettle for her breakfast.

Turning to Eliza for sympathy she was met by the cold comfort of—"Aren't ye lucky!"

"And for why?" queried Sarah indignantly.

"Indeed and ye are lucky," snorted Eliza, "if they were that loose mightn't they have slipped

down yer throat and choked ye in bed." And then they raised their voices.

Mary and Charles never could learn that the western peasants are never dangerous when they shout, but only when they are very quiet.

Another day Mary set out to visit Porgeen's father-in-law, reported by Porgeen to be sick unto death. The old woman received Mary with the usual courtesy and pointed out with pardonable pride the grand (unusual) clean state of the house.

Mary was delighted, thinking that at last her everlasting preaching of cleanliness had fallen on fruitful soil, but realized her mistake when told that the house would be dirtier than ever after the wake.

She then asked after the old man, and was promptly led to his bedroom, where she found everything, including the sick man, swept and garnished. "Now look at himself," said the old woman, with pride in her brogue, "isn't he lovely" —Mary murmured that he was, and the old woman went on, "Sure, he's washed and laid out clane and dacent like. Everything's ready except to throw the sheet over him." But this was too much for Mary, who fled home in horror, without even passing the time of day with the sick man.

A few days afterwards we heard that himself was up and about, and that herself was greatly vexed and put about at the waste of energy and money—bad cess to them both, added Porgeen.

Mary only once appealed to Robert for help and advice, and he cured her of ever doing so again. At the time she was greatly exercised over two of

the farm labourers, who were madly jealous of each other and of each other's husbands, and often used to have sanguinary battles when their husbands were away working.

In despair, Mary appealed to Robert, and his advice was—"Lave them alone, Miss; what harm if they murder each other—sure it's hard known which of the two has the best hung tongue in the barony." And then, at the top of his voice through the open smoking-room window, "I declare to God if ye stripped them two women of all their auld jealousies, there'd be nothing on them but their stays."

Mary would frequently walk over to call on a Mrs. Donelan, the wife of a large mountain farmer, who lived just the right distance off to give her sufficient exercise to make her sleep well, and Dash the right degree of appetite to finish his dinner. The family consisted of Mr. and Mrs. Tom Donelan and Donelan's mother.

On her return from a visit to Dublin young Mrs. Donelan gave herself great airs, and explained to Mary one day how their one and only servant girl always called her Mrs. Tom and her mother-in-law Mrs. Donelan; and that she had now instructed the girl to call her Mrs. Donelan and the old lady the dow-a-ger—with a strong accent on the middle syllable—Charles said that this was the result of the woman going to a cinema.

The next time Mary called she asked if Mrs. Donelan was at home. "Ah, no, me lady," replied the servant girl, "she's not in—but faith, the

auld badger's below in the kitchen. Will I be after calling her for ye?"

The same Mrs. Donelan junior called on Mary one Sunday afternoon, and was so overcome by Charles's beautiful get-up and austere manner when he handed her a cup of tea that she made frantic efforts to drink it through a wonderful veil she had invested in above in Dublin.

Even if we had been inclined to get stale when the best of the snipe shooting was over, I am sure Robert would never have allowed it, and would certainly have made our lives a burden if we had refused to go out shooting.

Whenever conditions were right we used to go out flight shooting; not only geese at night and duck in the evening, but when the wind blew strong from the reverse quarter we used to get great sport with the green plover flighting from the meadows in the dusk—I think the hardest shots of all, and, as Robert would say, it took a stone of cartridges to lay out one green plover.

On days when it blew a storm of rain from the west we used to make our way in the afternoon to one of the woods, and wait in some clearing for the wood-pigeons coming in to roost. And our average of cartridges for each pigeon in the bag must have been high.

Up to the middle of December, except for a few light frosts and two days of snow, the weather had been wonderfully mild—the air never hard and keen, like it is in England at that time of year, but soft and often moist.

Then came what Robert described as the father and mother of foxy days ; a day of gorgeous colours and heavenly sunshine, but with an uncanny clearness in the air, as though one's eyes had suddenly become the most powerful Zeiss glasses which ever came out of Jena. And, worst sign of all, the tops of the mountains cut the cobalt sky with a sharpness like a razor edge.

But though the air in the morning was almost hot, yet by lunch time, in spite of the brilliant sunshine, one began to feel that it was gradually growing colder and colder.

The robins, usually bursting with song on a foxy day, refused to sing at all, and moped about in the bushes with their feathers fluffed out : the only sound in the bird world came from some uneasy blackbirds in the shrubberies, with their never-ceasing curses of alarm, as though pursued by some phantom cat.

By evening the air was bitter, and when we had finished tea we put on top-coats and walked down to the bay, hoping to see some wonderful effects after the sun had set. And we were not disappointed.

The silence was complete and unearthly in that land of many winds : even the restless ocean was mute for once. A blackbird broke the silence once with a last curse at the imaginary cat, and presently a wee wren bravely started to sing its evening song, to quickly fade away, as though overpowered by the awful silence of all animal life and nature.

Though the sun had gone down, and the western sky was stained a deep orange red, yet there was an unusual amount of light everywhere, except in the hollows of the mountains, which were already an inky black. And not a sign of wild birds on sea or land.

Gradually the light faded away, the sky began to turn from fiery red to darkest Prussian blue, and a fog like a great layer of cotton wool to rise up from the sea in patches.

The cold was now intense, but we stayed on, fascinated by the rapid changes of colour reflected everywhere.

Away to the south and east the sky grew palest lemon, and above us a clear duck-egg green ; while to the west and north it turned the hardest steely blue.

The mountains looked flat and thin—for all the world like a gigantic black fence with sharp-cut, uneven top.

The sea, where the fog did not hide it, resembled a burnished steel mirror reflecting the colours of the sky above. And in the foreground the seaweed-covered rocks stood out like lumps of burnt umber.

Then the bird-life woke up. First a heron flapped lazily and noiselessly across the bay, looking large and dark against the patches of white fog.

The heron seemed to break the spell which lay over all birds that night, and in quick succession we heard the sad cry of curlew overhead, followed by the plaintive pipe of a flock of redshanks as they flitted past us towards the open sea. And

the heron answered with its hoarse croak, as it slowly made its way towards a clump of Scotch firs at the back of the stables.

Quickly the noise increased until we could hear overhead an almost uninterrupted rush of wings, all heading west towards the open shores of the ocean. The peculiar high-pitched note of wild ducks' wings ; the faster beat of the widgeon's longer wings ; the rush of teal and the heavy slow beat of thousands of geese. Lastly came the thundering hum of great wild swans, looking huge and ghostly in the fast-fading twilight. One and all flying from the horrors of coming starvation in the grim form of Black Frost.

Before we started to make our way back to the house the moon came up from behind the mountains ; and the sea fog, gaining strength as the bitter cold increased, began to creep up towards the house and spread over the land.

And as we stopped at the hall door for a last look at the wonderful scene, now bathed in moonlight, the mountains had the curious effect of floating on a sea of fog. And over all again the stillness of a great frost—the flight of birds to the shores of the ocean was over : only a flock of ghostly gulls wheeled over the house and swooped down towards the sea of fog.

We remembered before we went to bed that night that during the early afternoon we had seen with glasses a pair of great northern divers swimming in the bay—lovely fellows, with their greenish purply black heads, white waistcoats and spotted

coats showing up in the winter sunshine. Sure forerunners of hard weather.

We found the servants—good creatures—busy hunting out extra blankets and making up roaring turf fires for us in our bedrooms. And we wanted them that night and for several nights after.

There followed two days of driving snow and biting frost, and we never put our noses outside the house. Robert visited us hourly, and with every inch of snow the size of the bag of woodcock we would make when the snow quit and we could shoot the coverts round the house increased. He assured us that every cock within ten baronies would have to come to our woods.

On the third day we woke to a day of brilliant sunshine again and a strange country of dazzling white snow and blue sea. The mountains looked to be within a stone's throw of the house and a quarter their usual size, while the bay appeared to have shrunk to the size of a tiny estuary.

During breakfast Robert marshalled his beaters in front of the house—a great collection of farm hands, garden boys and grooms. Even Porseen and Maria were in the ranks, armed with stout ash-plants.

The first woods we shot lay on both sides of a deep valley, running from the mountains to the bay, with a mountain stream running at the bottom, the water of which looked black and hard against the soft white of the snow.

The trees were chiefly birch, looking a deep purple with the winter sun shining on them ; ash, with

their curious shining light-coloured bark, and some larch, quite black-looking and showing up the colours of the other trees. While here and there a group of wind-swept firs stood out a bronze green against the snowy background.

The undergrowth was good. Large patches of whins, rhododendrons, clumps of dead ferns and heather, with holly bushes everywhere. And in places thickets of low hazels.

The thicker the cover the more cock we found—in one sheltering hollow there must have been a cock under every bush, and the beaters went mad with excitement, exhorting Charles to hold his gun straight and never mind if he shot an odd beater—what harm, sure, there's plenty more.

But the pity was there was only Charles and myself—two more guns would have made all the difference. Bird after bird flew where these other guns would have been, but not one would leave the coverts and face the snow-clad mountains; and when flushed would pitch again either in the same wood or in a neighbouring one.

At the first shot in a wood a cloud of wood-pigeons would rise with loud clapping of wings, but hardly ever within shot.

Directly the beaters started working their sticks the wood, which at first had appeared empty of bird-life, would swarm with small birds. One wood especially was full of long-tailed tits, which kept together in a flock and flew from tree to tree ahead of us, twisting and turning on the smallest branches like a troupe of midget gymnasts.

Wrens, bullfinches, great tits, blue tits and robins all appeared quite tame from the intense cold. In fact, the robins often followed Charles and myself with inquiring gaze: probably they thought our guns were spades and were in hopes that we might dig up some worms.

The cock showed up black against the background of snow; and though they flew sleepily and heavily at first, by the time they had been flushed three or four times they went like bullets.

All the hares on the mountains must have been collected in the woods: some of the poor beasts fell victims to the beaters' sticks, unable to travel in the heavy snow. And every hare put up was the signal for an outburst of wild screams from the madly excited beaters. And when a fox was spotted sneaking off the yells rose to a frenzy.

During lunch—laid out by Patsey under a group of Scotch firs—Robert told us a story of a Welshman, who was once a guest of the old master's for cock shooting.

The Welshman was a great hunting man in his own land—a terrible man to ride—and he abused Robert and the master roundly when he saw them shooting hares and foxes.

This appeared to have made Robert very sore, and he made up his mind to be even with him. After a beat the master asked Robert if the Welshman had shot anything, and Robert replied: "Indeed and he has. He's just after shooting two of the finest foxes ever ye seen—as grand a right and left as any man could make."

“ And where are they ? ” queried the master.

“ Ah, they got away on him, more’s the pity, ” replied Robert, “ but I’ll be after bringing in their tails to-night.”

And sure enough, after dinner that night, when all the guests were collected in the smoking-room, Robert appeared at the window with a fine brush in each hand (he had got two foxes in his traps the previous day) and presented them to the speechless and infuriated Welshman. And I am sure Robert had a wicked grin on his face.

As soon as he could speak the Welshman protested that he would sooner cut off his right hand than shoot a fox ; but it was useless, and the fame of his right and left of foxes followed him in due course to his native land !

The porter provided for the beaters at lunch must have been extra powerful, or else the keen air was too much for them—at any rate, when we started again the noise was terrific, every man and boy shouting : “ Hi, cock ; shi, cock, ” at the top of his voice, with the result that Charles and I had to keep yards ahead of the noise to get a shot at all.

For three days we had the best of woodcock shooting. On the fourth we could not find a single bird, and Robert said that they had gone to the seashore in a last desperate effort to find food. Day by day the cold had increased and we thought that the shooting was now over, but Robert was never defeated ; at any rate, not in our time.

The following morning we found him waiting for us outside the hall door with an ass and cart,

the ass, in addition to its harness, wearing a curious head-dress resembling a monk's cowl. Robert then explained that we were to go green plover shooting with him ; that the frost made the plover so tame that they would nearly let an ass-cart touch them, but that we must first dress up as country people. He suggested Charles dressing up as an old woman, but he pretended not to hear.

All went well until Charles and I raised our guns simultaneously to shoot two plover. Without any warning the ass, which up to now had been doing about a yard a minute, suddenly woke up and started to back at a furious rate. Robert yelled and beat it with his ash-plant, but the ass only backed the faster.

We fired in a hurry, missing both birds, and at the same instant the wheel of the cart must have gone into the ditch at the side of the road. The cart half turned over, we all shot out into the ditch, and the ass lay down.

We were soon out of the ditch, soaked, but it took us some time to retrieve Charles's gun, covered with snow and mud.

Robert was profuse in his apologies, telling us the ass always carried on that ways, but that he had been partly sure he had got the better of her by getting his old woman to make the bonnet like a monk's cowl. His idea was that the bonnet would prevent the ass from seeing when we were going to fire, which was the signal for it to start backing.

Robert was mad keen for us to try again, but we had had enough and walked home.

The intense cold lasted for a fortnight, and a few days before the frost broke Robert took us to the shore of the open ocean to see the birds which had collected there in the hope of finding food under the sea-wrack.

The sight was a wonderful yet very sad one to a lover of game birds : one we will never forget. In places the seashore was literally covered with snipe, woodcock and plover, and all as tame as hens. I would not have believed there were so many in the whole of Ireland. And one small bay was almost covered from shore to shore with geese, duck, widgeon, teal and pintails.

One curious thing was that we did not see a jack snipe anywhere, and there is no doubt that this smallest of game birds can live well and comfortably on a vegetable diet of mosses, etc., when hard pressed by frost.

It is a sad pity that woodcock and snipe during hard frost invariably seem to put off migrating to a warmer climate until it is too late. All the birds we saw on the shore that day were too weak to fly at all, and when we approached them they could only hop painfully and slowly over the rough beach. We caught a few for curiosity, and found that they were nothing but skin and bone ; it was simply a question of whether they or the frost lasted the longer.

Robert told us afterwards that the country lads had killed hundreds of woodcock and snipe with sticks ; a cruel and stupid act, because the birds were quite useless for food. Probably more wood-

cock and snipe are killed during severe frost in this manner than die of actual starvation.

Soon after the frost broke we had to leave for England, as we had people coming to stay with us for Christmas—and I think that even Charles was sorry to go. For my part I shall never forget that land of wonderful sport and scenery, nor its kindly and amusing people.

We had a great send-off : every man, woman and child in the place coming to wish us God-speed and a speedy return. The women were all in tears, and many of the men also, but from a different cause.

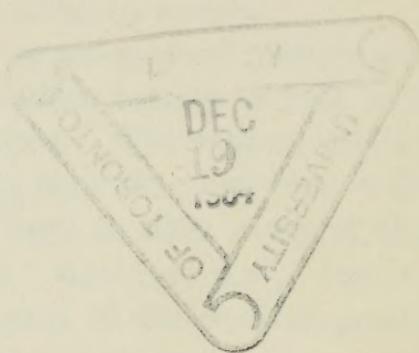
Looking back in after years at that happy time we spent at "Rackrent Hall," one is apt to forget the weaknesses of the western peasants, and only remember their virtues.

Nevertheless there is a charm about the wild west of Ireland which you will not find in any other country in the world.

At times the beauty of the scenery is beyond description. There are many other lovely wild places in the world—places still exactly as God made them—but none more lovely than the west of Ireland in its best mood.

There is no doubt that it is the Gulf Stream which is the cause of those wonderful lights on mountain, bog and sea which make up the ever-varying beauty of the West.

And where, oh where, can we ever meet again the likes of Patsey, Porseen, Jack and Robert ?



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